



BLUE AND GRAY

WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

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No. 26.

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 3, 1905.

Price 5 Cents.

AT CEDAR MOUNTAIN; OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY WITH STONEWALL JACKSON.

By LIEUT HARRY LEE.



Scipio, attired in the uniform of the Union General, found in the captured camp, certainly made an imposing appearance. He strutted up and down in a manner to convulse the Grays with merriment, while even the prisoners were compelled to laugh.

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The BOYS IN GRAY WITH STONEWALL JACKSON.

By LIEUT. HARRY LEE.

CHAPTER I.

UNDER ORDERS.

Rising in the Blue Ridge Mountains and tributary to the Rappahannock River, in the State of Virginia, is a rambling mountain stream known as the Rapid Ann or Rapidan.

In the month of August, 1862, two great armies, the Confederate army of Lee, and the Union army of Virginia, faced each other from opposite banks of this river.

Lee, Jackson, Ewell and Longstreet were at Gordonsville waiting for an opportunity to spring at the right flank of General Pope's army, which had marched south upon this line for the purpose of giving the defeated army of the Potomac a chance to escape from the Peninsula.

Flushed with victory, the veterans of Lee were pushing north to enter Maryland, and thus descend upon Washington and end the war.

Owing to military jealousies and the bane of politics Pope was not strongly supported in his campaign. The Confederate army forced him back.

Encamped near Gordonsville and waiting orders was the division of the plucky Stonewall Jackson. This famous commander, beloved by his soldiers, was at the zenith of his success and fame.

On the march north from Richmond there had been a redistributing of the regiments. In the regiment of Colonel Joe English, of Richmond, there was a company of youths, sons of the best families of that city, known as the Virginia Grays.

They had banded themselves together for the purpose of fighting for their country's rights, as they believed. They were actuated by motives as loyal and as brave as animated their brothers of the North, whom they now met upon the battlefield as enemies.

The captain of the Virginia Grays was Will Prentiss, the son of one of Richmond's prominent men. He was a tall, handsome youth, and possessed of all the rare gifts which are necessary to one born to command. His first lieutenant was Fred Randolph, also a youth of good family.

The Grays had fought bravely through the Seven Days' Battles before Richmond, and had covered themselves with glory. Now that the army was marching north to invade the land of the foe, they were pleased to be in the van.

Encamped with Jackson's division, they were simply waiting the order to advance. There is nothing so irksome to a soldier as tedious waiting.

The suspense gets upon his nerves. He knows nothing of his position. He is held in line by the sternest of

orders. He knows not what is going on about him, or what his fate is to be.

It is a relief when the order comes to go forward, and he goes with alacrity, for anything, even meeting the foe, is better than that fearful uncertainty.

The Grays were in just this frame of mind. For some days now they had languished in their camp or roasted in their rifle pits, for the month was August and the heat intense.

But on the present day a change came. An aide-de-camp galloped up and handed Will Prentiss a message. He recognized the seal of General Jackson.

Will's eyes grew large.

"Ah!" he muttered. "Here is something important. I hope it is an order to move."

He broke the seal and read:

"Dear Prentiss: I understand that our scouts last night encountered a small force of the Northern troops, who were holding the railroad cut just above Gordonsville. You are in excellent position to reach them. March at once and attack them. Drive them back at all hazards."

"Cordially yours, JACKSON, General Commanding."

It is hardly necessary to say that Will felt his veins tingle with joy. He lost no time.

Lieutenant Randolph had at that moment appeared at the door of the tent. In an instant Will held up the message and cried:

"Come here, Fred! Here is good news. Read this message!"

Fred took the despatch and read it. His face lighted up eagerly.

"Good!" he cried. "That is the sort of order to receive. Let us start at once."

"Certainly! Order the assembly! See that every man is equipped for light marching. Give extra rounds of ammunition to the men. See to this at once."

Fred Randolph needed no second bidding. He hurried away, and in a few moments the notes of the bugle announced the assembly.

The Grays rushed out of their tents and fell into line instantly. It was a quick and well-ordered movement.

The roll was called, and it was found that every member was in line. Then the orders were given to prepare for the march, and the Grays proceeded to do so.

It was a joyful turn in affairs. The boys longed for excitement. They welcomed the possibility of a hard fight.

Anything was better than lying inactive in camp. So, when they marched away down the company street, they were the envied cynosure of all eyes.

Soon they were beyond the lines of the camp and marching across the country toward the line of the Orange and Alexandria railroad. This had lately been repaired from Charlottesville to Gordonsville, and some distance beyond. As soon as Pope could be driven back, it was intended to utilize this road to carry supplies and troops forward to the front.

But there were innumerable bands of Union cavalry raiders continually passing up and down the valley beyond, and these threatened the railroad.

Already patrol guards had been posted along the railroad for some distance. But these could be driven back by an overpowering force.

So that was why Jackson sent the Virginia Grays to guard the cut. He knew the quality of Will Prentiss and his men, and they were bound to execute his orders.

When the Grays got well away from camp the music of fife and drum ceased, and they marched on silently.

They met videttes on the road and passed lines of outposts. In each case they were hailed and met with the announcement:

"You'll find it hot work over there on the railroad, boys. The Yanks are thick as flies in August."

"All right!" shouted Will. "We are ready for them. We'll give them all the fun they want, be sure."

And the boys sent up a cheer. On they marched. They were now far beyond the most advanced outposts. Soon they saw the embankment of the railroad in the distance. There was no sign of the enemy.

The Grays marched to the railroad track. The line of steel rails extended north and south until hidden by a curve. The Great Cut, which was just north of this, could be seen.

The hot August sun beat down fiercely and drew waves of heat from the iron rails. It was not by any means a comfortable job to walk the track.

But Will deployed his men in a long series of lines across the track and some distance into the fields on either side. In this manner, and with open ranks, they approached the cut.

Soon the Grays had reached it and were climbing its sides. No sign of the foe was to be seen.

Yet, the boy captain was not deceived. He knew that Jackson's scouts had reported seeing the Union cavalrymen about the place, and that they were not there for nothing. He felt sure that they were lurking in the vicinity.

"I don't see that they have ripped up the track anywhere, captain," said Fred Randolph, as they reached the cut. "Even the telegraph wires have not been cut."

"That is apparent," replied Will. "Yet I believe they are somewhere about here."

"If they are on the lookout they must know that we are here."

"Of course! That is the very reason, in my belief, that we do not see them."

"Then you think they are in hiding?"

"I must say that I do."

"In that case we must look out for an ambush or a sudden attack."

"Yes."

Will had adopted all precautions against such a possibility. He had sent scouts ahead and kept the Grays in line of battle.

But he decided to, for the present, remain at the cut

and await developments. If nothing was seen of the foe before nightfall, then they would fall back to the picket line of the main army. For Will knew that it would be folly for his small company to run the risk of a surprise attack after dark in that isolated locality.

For some while the Grays remained along the side of the cut. Matters were getting monotonous, and Joe Spotswood, orderly sergeant of the company, muttered:

"It's worse than being back in camp. Let's move ahead."

But Will Prentiss, who had heard the remark, suddenly raised his head and exclaimed:

"Listen! Do you hear that?"

It was the distant scream of a locomotive whistle from the direction of Charlottesville. Instantly the Grays aroused from their lethargy.

If there was really a train coming it was plainly bringing supplies to Gordonsville. The Union raiders would show themselves now, if ever.

But the long line of steel rails did not show that any apparent effort had been made to stop the train. At this Will Prentiss wondered.

But now, before he could give the matter further thought, the train came into view. There were a locomotive and six cars.

Two of the cars were passenger coaches—the others were open freight cars. On the open or flat cars were piled boxes and barrels, no doubt containing supplies for Jackson's advance guard.

The train was running at a slow rate, for the roadbed was not of the best, nor hardly safe for high speed.

The Grays, with some suspense, watched the train advance. If the Union raiders were near, would they attack it? There was no obstruction on the track, and apparently nothing to prevent the engineer running past at full speed.

Nearer drew the train. The young captain had begun to feel sure that the road was clear of the raiders. The train now came into the cut.

It was seen that the coaches were filled with recruits, mostly unarmed. The engineer, seeing the Grays lined along the sides of the cut, waved his arms to them.

Then the train ran by. But it had gone but a few hundred yards when the locomotive suddenly settled; there was a crashing and bumping, and it went over on its side.

The cars also left the rails and were piled in a heap along the embankment.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTURING THE FOE.

All was done in a few brief, startling seconds. The train but an instant before had been forging ahead over the steel rails. Now it lay a shattered wreck beside the track.

The recruits were crawling out of the coaches through the windows. The loads of supplies on the flat cars were piled up in heaps. Everything was in utter ruin.

The Grays started for the scene instantly, but Will gave the sharp order:

"Halt!"

The order was obeyed, and not a moment too soon.

The young captain's keen senses had been upon the alert, and by the best of luck, at that moment he caught sight of the glitter of steel in the woods below the train wreck.

Then he heard a distant wild cheer, and saw a line of blue come rushing on to the railroad embankment. In an instant all was plain to Will.

The Union raiders had skilfully drawn the spikes and left the rails in position on the ties, but unsecured.

As a result, when the weight of the locomotive struck them they spread. The raiders had remained hidden in the woods until they saw the train derailed.

It was plain that they had not regarded the Virginia Grays as worthy of consideration, for they had not seen fit to attack them.

Now, however, as they came surging out of the woods, Will Prentiss saw that they outnumbered the Grays, and the odds were such as would have persuaded a timorous commander that a retreat would be the safest course.

Not so with Will Prentiss. The boy captain's blood was aroused as he saw the blue line swooping down upon the derailed train.

"Steady, boys!" he shouted. "Close up in ranks! Fire!"

Fire was at once opened by the Grays. As they were on higher ground it was not at all difficult to get good aim, and the result was effective.

The Union soldiers began to fall rapidly, and the foremost line was for a moment demoralized in its advance. The Union colonel on horseback was waving his sword and urging them on.

"That's a brave colonel," said Joe Spotswood, as he bit off a cartridge and rammed it into his gun. "But he's my meat; I've got to have him."

"You can't get him at that distance," said Corporal Sam Payton.

"Can't?" said Joe, squinting his eye over the gun barrel. "Keep your eye on the cat."

Crack!

The Sharpe's rifle spoke sharply. The white horse on which the colonel was mounted reared and then went down in a heap. The colonel was hurled from his saddle, but was quickly on his feet.

"What did I tell you?" cried Payton.

"Confound it! Got the horse and not the man!" growled Spotswood. "I'm losing my nerve, that's sure."

The Grays had for a moment seemed to hold the raiders back. But now they came on again in such a legion that it became plain that they could not be held.

Will Prentiss was not reckless. He was bold and daring, but yet he could not see the logic of sacrificing his command.

He saw that nothing could be gained by ordering a charge. They would surely meet with repulse. Indeed, it might mean absolute annihilation.

So he ordered his men to fall back slowly. As they did so the Union soldiers advanced, and now reached the wrecked train.

Quickly they proceeded to carry out their purpose. The carloads of food and clothing intended for Jackson's men were heaped quickly upon the ruins of the train and set on fire.

Some of the recruits who had been in the coaches had escaped, and coming rapidly up the hillside, joined the Grays. But a number were captured.

Will Prentiss viewed the scene of destruction with keen dismay and much disappointment.

He was keenly disappointed at his inability to drive the foe back. In fact, it now became apparent to him that he would do well to secure his own safety.

The Union line was seen to be rapidly extending along his right, and in a few moments his flank would be enveloped.

At once he gave the order to retire across the cut. This was done in double-quick order. The Union soldiers came on in hot pursuit.

Will knew that he was a long way from the Confederate line. He knew that it would be folly to make a stand.

He had wondered that Jackson should have sent him upon such a fruitless errand. Where a company had been sent there should have been two regiments.

But it was not his part to question the wisdom of his superior officer. For all he knew this was but part of a larger movement, and he and his Grays were but a spoke in the wheel of a great evolution.

And such proved to be the case.

The Grays in rapidly retiring had swung to the west. This put the line of the foe between them and Jackson's camp.

But there had been no time to swing eastward. The foe had appeared on that flank too suddenly.

"I'm afraid we're in a hot box, Will!" cried Fred Randolph.

"How is that?" asked the young captain.

"Why, they are between us and our line of communication. We are cut off."

Will Prentiss shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't you mind that," he said. "We can fall back to Charlottesville. They will hit our line of the main army if they go too far in that direction."

Fred looked incredulous and did not offer argument. The Grays, firing all the while, retired stubbornly. They had covered a mile of rough retreat when an unexpected thing happened.

Suddenly a dull boom was heard to the north. It was followed by another and another.

Will Prentiss, who was in the front line with Fred Randolph, stopped short.

"Halt!" he cried.

The Grays instantly obeyed. They sought the shelter of a sunken roadway, which protected them well. Here they kept up a hot fire, which momentarily checked their pursuers.

And now a strange thing occurred. Suddenly the blue line began to melt away and retire. An officer on a black

horse had appeared on the scene, only to vanish as quickly.

Triumph shone in the eyes of Will Prentiss. At this moment Fred Randolph approached him.

"What's up, Will?" he cried. "What do you make of it? The foe is falling back."

"There is only one explanation."

"What is it?"

"A rear attack."

Fred caught the inspiration.

"By jingo, you are right!" he cried. "That explains the whole story. Hurrah! It's a trap for the foe, and we have been the bait!"

It seemed, indeed, as if Stonewall Jackson, the master of strategists, had devised and executed a brilliant scheme to destroy the band of Union raiders which had been causing the Confederate army so much trouble.

The boom of artillery sounded sullen and heavy in the north. It was plain that Jackson had sent a force around the rear of the Union forces and was now driving them back.

That was why the Grays' pursuers had fallen back. They had been recalled to meet this new attack in the rear.

Soon the line of blue which had been so assiduously pursuing them had melted away into the woods, and the Grays were left in the sunken road. For a moment Will Prentiss was undecided what to do.

Then he heard a startling sound in his rear. It was the thunder of horses' hoofs. From behind a bend in the road came a thousand mounted men.

Confederate cavalry they were. A detachment of Stuart's men. In an instant they were about the Grays.

Their commanding officer, Colonel Barksdale, dismounted and, saluting Will, cried:

"Is this Captain Prentiss of the Virginia Grays?"

"It is!" replied Will.

"I am Colonel Barksdale. I am here to reinforce you. Three regiments of our Virginia boys have cut around to the north and headed off these Union raiders. We have got them between us, and we mean to cut them all to pieces."

"Hurrah!" cried Will. "That is good news. But will they come this way?"

"They will. You see, Barksdale has artillery, and he can drive them right down here. We must not let them get through."

"I shall be pleased to co-operate with you in any possible way," replied Will.

This question settled, at once they began to make preparations for receiving the enemy. The cavalry was dismounted and the horses sent to the rear. Then the troopers deployed in double lines along the sunken road, which made quite a fair breastwork for them.

The distant booming of the artillery seemed to grow nearer now.

"That means that the foe is being driven back!" cried Barksdale. "We must be ready for them."

It was a suspenseful time. Every moment the cannon-

ade grew nearer. The rattle of musketry and all the sounds of a battle came to the ears of the Grays.

And now the fragments of a Union line were seen to appear among the trees. Stragglers rushed out and threw down their arms. They were ordered to come in and surrender. In a short while dozens of prisoners were in the rear of the Grays.

Then Colonel Barksdale came running along the line.

"They are coming!" he cried. "Jackson is rolling up their line like paper. Let every man be ready for them."

It was an exciting moment. The crash and roar of the battle grew nearer every moment. Then down through the trees came the retreating mass of blue.

Colonel Barksdale's order went up to open fire. The carbines of the cavalry and the muskets of the Grays crashed in one continuous volley.

The demoralized Union brigade, taken thus unexpectedly in the rear, threw down their arms and begged for quarter. In a very short space of time all were prisoners.

Jackson's men on one side broke into wild cheers of triumph. The Grays and the cavalrymen joined them.

Over two thousand Union raiders were thus captured, with their horses and all their equipments. It was a ten-strike.

CHAPTER III.

THE INTERVIEW BY THE RIVER.

When night fell on the scene the prisoners were marching under guard for Gordonsville, from whence they were to be sent to Richmond.

General Jackson and his brigade now turned their faces back to camp. But the Virginia Grays remained behind, as did the cavalry under Barksdale.

The latter intended to rejoin Stuart. But the Grays had been given a new commission by Jackson.

The general had been much pleased at the clever manner in which Will Prentiss had held the position in the cut. He called the young captain aside, and said:

"Prentiss, I am convinced that you are to be trusted with any dangerous enterprise. You have the grit and the shrewdness to carry it out. Now I have some work for you."

"I am at your service, General Jackson," replied Will. "I am ready to do your bidding."

"Very good," replied the general. "My desire is that you will follow up this valley to the Rapid Ann. Not far from Cedar Mountain there lives a man named Jim Weedon. He is ostensibly a farmer, and lives in a small cabin just outside the Union lines. In reality he is one of our keenest spies. I want you to deliver to him this packet."

Jackson placed the packet in Will's hand. The young captain was thrilled.

"I will deliver it, general," he replied. "But how shall I find Jim Weedon?"

"Follow the Gordonsville road one mile from the Rapid Ann ford. Then, if you look west up against the mountainside, you will see a forked pine. It is a solitary tree

and a distinct landmark. Jim Weedon's house is but a few rods from that tree."

Will's face cleared.

"We will find him!" he cried, eagerly. "Shall I return and report to you?"

"No."

Will looked surprised. General Jackson lowered his voice and said:

"I am going to tell you confidentially, Prentiss, that we shall move upon the enemy's position at Cedar Mountain at once. You are to remain at Weedon's. In that packet of papers which you give him are orders for you."

Will saluted and said:

"Your orders shall be obeyed, general. I shall start at once."

So, when Jackson had started for Gordonsville, and Barksdale had ridden away to the east to rejoin Stuart, the Virginia Grays set out for the north and directly toward the Union lines.

They marched until midnight, when Will called a halt. It was necessary for the Grays to have a rest.

So he ordered them to bivouac, but to make no fires, for the blaze might attract the attention of some Union scout.

The Grays were sufficiently tired to lie down in their blankets on the hard ground and sleep soundly. In a short while nearly all were asleep.

Of course a line of pickets had been established around the camp. Will Prentiss, however, was in no mood for sleep.

He had a curious sense of impending danger. He walked about the camp to see that everything was right and, finally yielding to impulse, passed beyond the picket guard and along the highway.

He could hear the rush of waters, and knew what it meant. The Rapid Ann was just ahead. In the early morning they would cross it.

Scouts had already passed beyond its opposite bank, and had reported the coast clear. There was no sign of the enemy.

So the young captain felt no fear as he strolled on. Soon the round wound down a little hillside into a ravine, and there, tumbling in the dim light, he saw the waters of the river.

Will sat down on a stump and listened to the ripple of the stream over its gravelly bed. He gave himself up to thought.

He was thus engaged when the sound of footsteps came to his ear. Before he could rise a tall figure emerged from the gloom and approached.

Will remained motionless. He was thrilled with sudden wonderment and suspicion.

The stump upon which he sat was just in the shadow of a little clump of bushes. At first he thought the unknown was about to make himself known.

But, when not twenty feet from Will he halted. The young captain then became convinced that his presence was not known to the other.

Will remained absolutely silent and awaited developments. In the gloom he could not see the other's face; but the outline of his figure showed that he was a man of powerful proportions and dressed in military garb. As the color was dark, Will at once assumed that he did not wear the gray, and consequently was a Union officer. That he was an officer was conclusive by the sword that he wore at his side.

The unknown's back was turned to the boy captain, and he seemed to be looking across the river.

After standing thus statue-like for some moments the Union officer began to pace up and down.

It was a thrilling ordeal for Will Prentiss. The young captain was fearful of discovery, his foe was so near him. He dared not move hand or foot, and his position was exceedingly cramped.

But the shadow of the bush was great enough to hide him. He was safe.

Up and down paced the Union officer. Will's curiosity now was great.

What was his purpose? Who was he, and what had brought him to this side of the Rapid Ann at this hour of the night?

For a moment Will felt a chill as he reflected upon the possibility of there being others of his class in the vicinity. Perhaps it was part of a plan to surprise the midnight camp of the Grays.

Will revolved several plans in his mind. One of these involved an attempt to make a prisoner of the Union officer.

The young captain had a pistol, but he had left his sword at the camp. However, he would not have feared to attack the foe on even terms.

But just at that moment the officer halted in his monotonous walk. He seemed to listen attentively, and then a sibilant whistle escaped his lips.

It was answered from the direction of the river.

There was a splashing in the water below, and horses' hoofs rang upon the gravel. A moment later a dark figure came up on foot.

"Hello, Jim!" said the Union officer, in a low tone.

"Howdy, Colonel Warden," said the newcomer, in a somewhat louder tone. "I am a leetle late, as ye see, but I kept my word."

"Confound you, Jim Weedon! I had begun to think you were playing me false."

"Humph! Do you think I am a fool? I know which side my bread is buttered on, you bet. Well, everything looks favorable."

"Do you mean it?"

"I do."

"What have you heard?"

"Nothing as yet. But I shall hear in a few hours. Then I'll place everything in your hands."

"Did you hear that Jackson captured a party of our raiders down near Gordonsville yesterday?"

"Yes," replied Weedon. "It was a fool trick in them to go down there. There's no use in putting your head in the lion's mouth."

"Well, I think so, too," agreed Colonel Warden; "but it's done, and it can't be helped now. If we can only decoy Jackson down toward the lower Rapidan we can put him out of the game."

Will Prentiss had listened to all this with the deepest of amazement, not unmixed with horror.

He knew well enough that the man in the butternut suit who was thus treating with Colonel Warden was Jim Weedon, the trusted scout of Stonewall Jackson, the man for whom he had important papers at that moment in his breast pocket.

Of course Jackson could not know that Weedon was a traitor.

But that he was such seemed now to be revealed absolutely to Will Prentiss. And this caused the young captain a tremendous shock.

The impulse was upon him to spring up and denounce him, and attempt the capture of both. But a moment's thought convinced him that this was entirely out of the question.

For all he knew Warden had plenty of soldiers within easy call.

"I don't know whether you could do that or not," said the traitor, "but I kin pretty soon place in your hands the papers and maps giving full details of ther proposed attack on ther Union camp at Cedar Mountain."

"Of what value will that be?"

"Forewarned is forearmed! Ye kin fix it so that when that attack is made they will put themselves in a position to be jest wiped out."

"True enough," agreed Warden. "You say you expect those papers soon?"

"I expect 'em in the morning."

"Good! When you get them let me know."

"You kin bet I will. Whar is yer camp now?"

"Down below here at the forks. I must have those papers, Weedon. Don't fail me."

"You kin bet I won't. Oh, by the way—what about the other matter?"

An imprecation escaped Warden.

"We'll attend to that just as soon as we have got the wires laid to give Jackson a beating. If he gets past us, there is no telling what will come of it. There is no Confederate general we fear more than we do Jackson."

"Well, he's a dangerous one, you bet! But, I say! Won't the old sutler come to terms?"

"He hasn't yet. His daughter treats me with scorn. Confound her pretty face! I'll even it up with her. She's going to be mine at all costs."

The spy laughed.

"Faint heart never did win fair lady," he said. "I kinder admire yer pluck, colonel. But ther wust thing in ther world ter handle is a woman that ain't willin'. An' she's one of 'em."

"I'll handle her!" growled Warden. "She ought to be mighty glad to marry a colonel in the regular army. She's only a sutler's daughter. Her father is a driveling old

idiot. Caroline Mayfair is to be my wife, willy-nilly; I'll have her, fair means or foul!"

"Well, when you get ready let me know," said Weedon. "I know a safe place ter hide her away an' bring her ter terms. But old Joe Mayfair will leave no stone unturned to find her."

"Some fine morning he'll be found hanging to the limb of a tree," growled Warden. "I am in earnest. Now, Weedon, you've got to stick by me. If you show any signs of the traitor I'll kill you on sight."

There was an instant's ominous silence. Then the spy whistled softly:

"Don't do no good to threaten me, Eph Warden," he said. "I'll do jest as I please. But I won't go back on my word. Whatever I say I'll do, you bet I'll do it. Now, if you'll show up at my house to-morrow morning I'll have those papers—"

"But the messenger who brings them—"

"He'll never go back alive; and he won't be the first one, either."

CHAPTER IV.

A VISIT TO THE SPY'S ABODE.

Warden seemed to be wholly satisfied. He now clanked his sword on the rocky ground and arose.

"All right, Weedon," he said. "I'll call at your cabin in the morning. You will be so kind as to have the papers ready."

"All right, Colonel Warden."

"Mind, if you play traitor it will be the worse for you."

Weedon laughed discordantly.

"You need have little fear of that," he said. "Keep up your end and I'll keep up mine."

Warden strode away in the gloom down the creek. In a few moments the clatter of horse's hoofs sounded in the distance.

For one moment Will Prentiss was impelled to spring out and confront the treacherous spy and scout. But he restrained himself.

Another idea, and it seemed to him a better one, occurred to him.

Weedon remained silent a moment, and apparently listened to the receding hoof-beats of his confrere's horse.

Then he strode away toward the river. A few moments later the tread of horse's hoofs was followed by splashing, as he forded the river.

Will Prentiss arose from his cramped position. He drew a deep breath, like a man about to dive.

"Whew!" he muttered; "these are certainly strange times. No man is to be trusted. So Weedon's a traitor! What shall I do? Of course General Jackson will not care to have those papers fall into his hands under these circumstances. And yet I have my orders to deliver them. Perhaps—"

He hesitated, and was a long time plunged in thought.

It was certainly a hard position he was placed in. He walked silently back to camp.

He was hailed by the picket, but passed on into the camp. All was silent there. The Grays were sleeping soundly. Will lay down and rolled himself up in his blanket.

But sleep did not come to his eyelids. He could not drive from his mind the incidents just described.

He was in a deep quandary as to what was to be done. In the morning he must go on and apply at the cabin home of the scout and spy, Weedon.

In those very papers which he should deliver to Weedon were orders for himself.

Will started up eagerly. He drew the packet from his bosom. He had started to strike a match, when a sudden thought caused him to drop it.

It was against orders to open the packet. Strictly his orders were first to deliver the papers to Weedon.

Could he disobey orders? It was not soldierly. It was against his principles. Softly he replaced the packet in his bosom.

Then he threw aside his blankets and arose. His brow was hot and feverish. The matter was getting upon his nerves.

It occurred to him to send a courier post haste to Jackson with a message apprising him of what he had learned. But he knew the courier could not go and return in such a limited time.

Will was plunged deeper than ever into indecision and dismay. He staggered away some steps, and was about to sit down on a log, when a low voice sounded behind him.

"What's the matter, Will? Are you sick?"

It was Fred Randolph.

"Fred!" exclaimed the young captain, with a gasp of relief. "I am glad you are awake. You are just the person I most desire to see."

"Well, here I am," said the young lieutenant. "What can I do for you?"

Will led his lieutenant some distance away, where he was sure they would not be overheard. Then he said:

"I have made a terrible discovery."

The lieutenant gave a start.

"Ah!" he exclaimed; "what is it?"

"You know that we have orders from General Jackson to march to the cabin of one Jim Weedon and deliver to him important papers from the general?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have just learned that this Jim Weedon is a traitor."

"A Union spy?"

"Yes."

For a moment there was silence. Then the young lieutenant asked:

"How did you learn this?"

Will now gave a full account of his adventures of an hour before. The young lieutenant listened spellbound.

"That is indeed a revelation," he exclaimed. "On my word, Will, it won't do to put those papers in Weedon's hands."

"That is just what I think. But it is our orders."

"Orders or no orders, we must use common sense. General Jackson will expect it of us."

Will shook his head.

"Army discipline demands that orders must be obeyed irrespective of personal opinion or knowledge. Perhaps Jackson knows this fellow is a spy and sending him these orders is a part of his game."

Fred gave a start.

"Perhaps so," he said. "But I would like to know what is in that packet of papers."

"So would I. General Jackson said there were orders for us in there."

"Then I don't see why we have not an excuse for opening them."

"Not until they are delivered."

For some moments Lieutenant Randolph seemed plunged in thought. Finally he looked up and said:

"I have an idea, Will."

"What?"

"If we wait till morning and march our company across the Rapid Ann, and that villain lies in wait for us with a regiment of Union soldiers, we will be in a bad scrape."

"That is so."

"Now, I propose that we first ascertain just what our position is."

"How?"

"It cannot be far from the banks of the Rapid Ann to his home. Didn't General Jackson say it was about a mile?"

"Yes; but I fear we could not find it in the dark."

"We can try."

Will hesitated a moment.

"I can see little to be gained by arousing the boys now."

"No, you do not understand me," said Fred. "I mean that you and I will pay Weedon a visit. We can easily go and get back before daybreak."

The idea flashed upon Will Prentiss like an inspiration. Instantly he cried:

"Capital! That is our best plan. Just notify Second Lieutenant Walton. We will carry out that plan."

"I think it is our best move. We will catch Weedon off his guard. Let him open those despatches and we will learn what our orders are. Then, if necessary, we will hold him."

Will caught the idea at once. Fred hastened to arouse Dick Walton, the second lieutenant, who was at once put in charge of the camp.

Then, with a brief preparation, the young captain and his lieutenant set out. They left the camp and quickly made their way down to the river.

They found the fordway and managed to cross without getting much wet. They then started down the valley road.

Up to the left towered the range of Cedar Mountain. They knew that the Union forces of Banks and Porter were intrenched there.

The two young Confederate officers proceeded with the utmost care.

They had no desire to run into an ambush or a trap. They knew that they were in a dangerous region.

Will kept a sharp lookout for the forked pine described

by Jackson. Suddenly, as they crept along, Fred clutched Will's arm.

"Look!" he whispered.

Outlined against the sky and far above them was the old pine tree. They halted a moment to again get their bearings.

It did not take them long, however, and soon they were climbing the mountainside.

In the darkness they had hard work to find their way, but after awhile Will struck into a path.

He followed it for several hundred yards, when a distant light became visible.

"There is the cabin!" exclaimed Fred. "Beyond a doubt we will find him there."

"I hope so."

The two young officers drew near the light and saw that it emanated from the window of a cabin.

Boldly they approached this. There was no sign of living being outside. The boys crept up to the window and looked in.

They saw a solitary figure seated at a table on which was a lamp. The interior of the cabin was rough and simple. The figure at the table was Weedon.

Will stepped boldly to the door and tapped on it. There was a shuffling of feet, and then the door opened.

"Howdy, strangers!"

"Are you Jim Weedon?" asked Will.

"That's me," was the reply. "Who are you, and what do ye want?"

"Are you not expecting us?"

The spy leaned forward and now the light fell upon their uniforms. With an exclamation he stepped back.

"Come in!" he exclaimed, in a half-whisper. "I know ye now."

Will and Fred stepped into the cabin. The spy stared at them in the light.

"Great wildcats!" he exclaimed. "Are all the boys of Jackson's army dressed as slick as ye? Why, them uniforms are handsome enough for a Richmond ballroom."

"All right, my friend," said Will, sharply. "We are here on business of the most important kind. You should know what it is."

At once the spy grew serious.

"Sit down," he said, briefly. "Did ye bring me the papers?"

"Yes."

"Whar are they?"

"I have them here."

Will took the packet of papers from his pocket and laid them on the table. The two young officers were on the alert.

The spy pounced upon them like a hawk and thrust them into his blouse.

"All right," he said. "I'll take keer of 'em. When is Jackson going to move?"

"See here, Weedon," said Will, quietly. "You are to let us see those papers. You are to open them now."

Weedon's lip curled.

"Who told ye that?" he demanded.

"General Jackson himself. Our orders are inside those papers."

"Are they?" said Weedon, coolly. "Well, you can march your company up here in the morning, and then when I get time to look them over I'll give you your orders. That's all."

CHAPTER V.

IN A TRAP.

For a moment Will Prentiss felt the hair rising slowly on his scalp. He was never more angry in his life.

The cool insolence of the fellow, his defiance and contempt nettled the young captain beyond endurance.

Moreover, he did not intend that Weedon or the papers should go further. He was satisfied of the treachery of the spy now absolutely.

So he said quietly, but firmly:

"I have no intention of marching my company up here to-morrow. I have no intention of waiting your pleasure in this matter. I want you to open those papers now and here!"

Weedon stared at Will a moment and then laughed again.

"Well, well," he said, mockingly. "It is evident ye think I'm tender. P'raps I don't know my business."

"I think I know it, too," said Will.

"Wall, what is it?"

"You are a spy and a traitor!"

Weedon dropped his feet from the table, where he had them perched, and reached for his pistol.

His face was purple.

"Ye insult me!" he gritted. "I'll have yer life fer that."

"No!"

He looked into the muzzle of Will's pistol. The boy captain was ready.

"Lay those papers back on the table, Jim Weedon, or you die!"

The spy's face grew a sickly yellow.

"They're my property," he gritted. "You've no right to 'em. It's all a secret between me an' General Jackson. If I give 'em up now he'd have me shot."

"Look here, Weedon," said Will, coldly. "Your card is played. I am onto you absolutely. You are a traitor."

"Ye lie!"

"Whom did you meet a few hours ago down on the opposite bank of the Rapid Ann river?"

The spy's face grew livid.

"Eh?" he gritted. "What's that to you?"

"It's a good deal to me and to the cause of the Confederacy. It proves that you are not safe to entrust with its secrets."

"The man I met down thar is a friend of the Confederacy."

"That is a lie! He is a Union colonel."

"Wall, what of that? My meeting with him is part of the game. The best thing you kin do is ter obey orders.

Go back an' march yer men up hyar at daybreak an' git yer orders."

Will and Fred stared at each other. Was the fellow truthful? He certainly spoke with confidence.

Or was it his quick and lightning-like ability to see and grasp this subterfuge? For a moment the two young officers were befogged.

"See here, Weedon," said Will, calmly, "we are true to the Confederacy. We stand ready to give our lives for the cause. You are a Virginian. If you are a traitor you will meet with terrible punishment."

"I know it," said Weedon, complacently. "The best thing you'uns can do is to obey the general's orders."

"We want to be assured first that those orders are straight," said Will, resolutely. "There is no reason why you cannot open those papers and acquaint us with the orders contained therein for us as well now as later. We require you to do so."

There was an ugly gleam in Weedon's eyes.

"And I refuse ter do so."

"Then we must have the papers back. I assure you, we are not trifling."

"Why do ye want me to open them now?" asked the spy.

"Because General Jackson told us you would do so. If we bring our men up here in the morning you may have a powerful trap ready for us."

"Oh, I see," gritted Weedon. "You don't trust me. You think I am a traitor."

"I do."

For a full half minute Weedon returned the gaze of the young captain. There was contempt and hatred in his eyes.

"You might as well go back to your men," he said, finally. "Ye'll never get those papers till I'm ready."

"Yes, there is a way to get them," said Will.

"How?"

"In this way."

The young captain's arm shot forward, and his hand gripped the spy's collar. But even in that instant Weedon kicked the table over and gave a shrill whistle.

Instantly the tramp of hurrying feet was heard outside, and into the cabin bounded a dozen soldiers in blue.

Will and Fred had neither of them time to think of escape. They saw in that instant that they were trapped. Resistance was of no avail.

The villain broke away from Will's grip, and a yell of exultation and defiance escaped him.

"Ha, ha!" he yelled. "Thought ye had ther game in yer hands, didn't yer? Wall, it's a turn over for ye, ain't it? I didn't mean to spring it on ye so soon. But it's all right, fer Colonel Warden kin go down in ther mornin' with his regiment and round up yer company of Geys."

"You cowardly traitor!" cried Will.

"Call me what ye will!" gloated Weedon. "I ain't done yet, either. Jackson never'll know what become of ye. His orders I have here mean to send false reports into the Union camp, so that he kin march over an' catch General

Banks unawares. But you bet Banks will be ready with a nice little trap for the brave Stonewall Jackson."

Will and Fred were wild with dismay and rage. They felt decidedly crestfallen withal that they had allowed themselves to be so easily trapped.

In a moment they were prisoners with the bayonets of the Union guards at their backs.

Resistance was out of the question.

Neither even had his sword with him. Will had a pistol, but it would have been useless.

They could do nothing but succumb. Weedon, convulsed with triumph, now ordered the guard to take them away.

"Take them inter camp," he said. "Turn 'em over to ther provost marshal. He'll take care of 'em. We'll get the others to-morrow."

With the bayonets at their backs the boys were marched out of the hut. In a few moments they were descending the mountainside to the highway.

It was a humiliating thought to them that they were prisoners. While they knew that their positions as officers demanded special consideration, and that sooner or later they might be exchanged, it was, nevertheless, a stigma upon their pride.

Then, again, Will's disappointment at his failure to execute General Jackson's order was keen.

Through the night they were marched over the highway until they came into a gap in the mountainside. Here they encountered the Union picket.

The guard passed in with their prisoners, and in due time the boys were in the Union camp and had been taken to the tent of the provost marshal.

Here they were closely catechised. But the boys were astute enough to evade most of the questions. They were finally led away to the prisoners' quarters, which consisted of a few tents, surrounded by a line of guards.

"Well," said Will, despondently, as they now came to a halt, "this is the toughest streak of luck we've struck yet, Fred."

"That is right."

"We are certainly in for it now."

"I don't see any hope for us, unless Jackson comes up and wipes out the whole gang here."

"I'm afraid he won't do it, for they will probably send us to Washington in the morning."

The boys could not look on the hopeful side, though even at this hour they began to consider a plan of escape. But the line of guards was too strong.

But the night had passed already, and dawn was at hand. It was welcome to the two young prisoners, though it brought them little cheer.

They could not help but think of their comrades back there on the other side of the Rapid Ann. There did not seem any chance for them to escape capture.

Indeed, the boys were on the watch to see them come marching in between lines of guards. But as yet they did not appear.

The boys, from their position, as near the deadline as

they dared to get, became occupied in watching the busy doings of the Union camp.

It was certain that Banks had been made aware of the purpose of Ewell and Jackson to attack him. He was making all preparations to resist that attack.

The sight was an enlivening one. Troops of infantrymen went skurrying past. Officers galloped hither and thither, and all was a fever of excitement and expectancy.

While the boys were thus engaged Fred gave a sudden start.

"By jingo! Look yonder, Will! Do you remember the story you heard last night about the sutler and his daughter? If that is Caroline Mayfair she is certainly beautiful enough to tempt the love of just such a scoundrel as Colonel Eph Warden."

Not fifty yards away a sutler's wagon had drawn up. The sutler himself, a portly, good-humored sort of man, had opened the wagon flaps, and was displaying his goods to the soldiers who came crowding up.

The young girl who sat in the wagon and handed out the articles as sold was certainly very pretty. She had a beautiful shade of brown hair, deep, melting eyes, regular features and a perfect complexion.

She did not heed the admiring glances of the bold soldier boys, many of whom were attracted to the wagon as much by her beauty as aught else.

Will remembered the threat of Colonel Warden. The young captain felt a keen desire to acquaint the sutler and his pretty daughter of their peril.

But he had no opportunity to do so. The young Confederates watched them until they had passed on.

Now, however, a file of soldiers was seen approaching the deadline. The sergeant in charge paused and read from a slip of paper loudly:

"Captain Will Prentiss, Lieutenant Randolph! Step forward!"

The boys were glad of any sort of change in their condition. So they stepped out into view.

The sergeant looked at them critically, and said:

"Fall in!"

At once the two young Confederate officers complied, and soon were being marched away. They halted before a large marquee tent.

A moment more and they were marched into the tent.

CHAPTER VI.

RESCUED.

There were several officers in the tent. One of them wore the shoulder-straps of a general.

He scanned the prisoners closely as they entered. His manner was brusque, but not unkind, as he said:

"The prisoners will step forward."

The boys complied.

"Which of you is Captain Will Prentiss?" he asked, apparently not noting the insignia of Will's rank.

"That is my name," said Will.

"Oh! I have heard much of you, sir," said General Banks, for he it was. "You are a fighter. If all you Con-

federates could fight a hard we would have to yield to you."

"I am but a poor representative of our fighting men," said Will. "I have a brave company of boys behind me, loyal to the South and its rights."

"Very good. Now, my dear Prentiss, you were entrusted with orders by General Jackson, were you not?"

"I was, sir."

"It is quite unfortunate for you that you fell into the hands of our spy."

"He is a traitor. He is a Virginian and a traitor," declared Will.

"You refer to Weedon, the spy?"

"I do."

"Well, I am not his greatest admirer," said General Banks. "But he has done valuable work for us. Now, Prentiss, tell me how many men Jackson has."

Will's face flushed.

"Do you think I am a traitor also?" he asked, hotly.

"You are a prisoner, and it will go much easier with you if you choose to volunteer us information."

"I must refuse to give you any information whatever," replied Will. "I would be false to my oath as a Confederate officer."

"By these papers," said General Banks, "I see that Jackson was to force our right wing while Ewell engaged our center. I'll wager he'll find it a hard task."

"General Jackson is capable of carrying out his own enterprises," said Will.

"I will admit that he has most phenomenal success. Then you refuse to give us any information?"

"I do!"

"I offer you the privilege of a parole."

"Not even for absolute freedom would I turn traitor."

General Banks drummed on the table with his fingers. He looked at the handsome young officer before him, and said:

"I admire your spirit, sir, but I can assure you that I will get this information I seek from you from some other source."

"That may be, sir," said Will, firmly. "But the man who gives it to you, if he is a Confederate, should be shot."

General Banks smiled and bowed.

"If the Confederacy has much timber like you it will be hard to conquer," he said. "Guard, you may take the prisoners away. See that they are sent to the rear and shipped for Washington at once."

The guard saluted and the sergeant gave the order:

"Fall in by twos! March!"

Will and Fred were marched away now and across the camp ground. It gave them a good chance to see the defenses of the Union fort.

They saw rows of entrenchments and parks of artillery. Will saw that the ground was well chosen and that it would take a determined assault to carry it.

Knowing what he did of Jaelson's tactics, however, he could see vulnerable points, where a feint in one quarter would expose another.

The prisoners had nearly reached the end of the parade ground when Will saw the sutler's wagon wending its way out of the encampment.

The sutler and his daughter sat on the wagon seat, and as the boys passed the girl turned and looked at the prisoners.

Her eye caught Will's and she gave him a coy glance of interest. The young Confederate officer smiled and lifted his cap.

The girl turned her head quickly. But Will felt sure that she would know him when they should meet again.

He would have been glad then and there to have apprised her of her peril from Warden; but he had no opportunity. As they walked on Will asked the sergeant of the guard:

"Do you mind telling us where we are being taken?"

"Not at all," replied the sergeant, who seemed a kindly-hearted man. "You are to become members of the prisoners' train to be sent under escort to Washington."

Will's heart sank. It seemed to him a hard thing to be taken away to the distant military prison, not knowing what was the fate of his comrades.

He feared much that they were ere this prisoners as well. But there was no help for it, so on they marched.

A little way to the north of Bank's encampment a squadron of Union cavalry was drawn up. Over a hundred Confederate prisoners were in marching line.

Will and Fred became part of the rearguard of this line. They had hardly been given their positions when the order was given to march.

The line of prisoners set out on the long tramp to Manassas Junction, whence they would be carried by rail to Alexandria.

In the hot August sun the marching was not easy. The cavalry squad kept alongside. Sometimes a poor fellow dropped by the roadside.

In that case a stretcher was brought up, and his comrades took turns in carrying him. Mile after mile the prisoners straggled on thus.

They had been long out of sight of the encampment of Banks. One of the guards had been kind enough to answer some of Will's questions.

"Pope is over there with the main body of the army," he said, pointing to the west. "If there is a battle at Cedar Mountain to-day he will reinforce Banks."

Will noted all these points and kept his counsel, though it did not occur to him that he would ever be able to use them.

The file of prisoners had kept on for hours and were beginning to lag, when suddenly down the road in front of them a horseman came riding madly.

He was a vidette sent ahead to keep a lookout for Confederate detachments. As he came up excitedly he spoke a few whispered words to the captain of the squad.

Instantly the prisoners were ordered back and concentrated, while the cavalry formed a square about them. Then all knew what it meant.

Wild hope leaped into every bosom. The cheer that rose spontaneously from their lips was thrilled with joy.

They knew that a Confederate detachment was coming down upon the Union guard. It was only a question of the numerical superiority of the Confederates.

If they were strong enough in force they would certainly force the guard to give way, and the prisoners would be liberated. But there was the question.

Now the guard had begun to open fire. That this was answered was apparent now and then when a saddle was emptied.

It was plain that the attacking Confederates feared to fire heavy volleys for fear of killing the prisoners.

So after awhile it became evident that they were coming to the charge. The prisoners now saw them coming in a great line of horse and flashing sabres.

And they came like a whirlwind. The Union guard made a brave but useless resistance.

The Confederate cavalrymen went through them like a meteor. Right and left the sabre flashed. The Union guard was scattered like chaff.

Will, Prentiss and Fred Randolph fairly embraced each other with delight. In a few moments all was over, and several hundred of Stuart's cavalry were among them shaking hands and congratulating them.

Will had secured one of the Union guards' horses, and now he mounted, with Fred behind him. The colonel of the cavalry detachment gave them some startling information.

"Jackson has crossed the Rapid Ann," he said. "He is moving up on Bank's left flank."

"The left flank!" cried Will. "I say, Fred! If we ride south from here we ought to ride right into his lines."

"So you will," said the colonel.

The other prisoners had now also turned their faces south toward Jackson's lines. The squad of cavalry went along with them as escort.

But Will and Fred were enabled to ride ahead. This they did until they finally turned into a highway which had a guide board marked Gordonsville.

Along this highway they rode for half an hour. They were then rewarded with a startling distant sound.

It was the boom of artillery.

"The battle is on!" cried Will. "Let us try and get there in time to take a hand in it."

"Good!" cried Fred. "Luck will be ours if they did not capture the Grays."

"I don't believe they did."

"On what do you base that assumption?"

"Well, the fact that Jackson crossed the Rapid Ann by daybreak. His advance guard must have reached our camp soon after we left."

"Oh, what fools we were to walk into that trap!"

"We certainly were. No doubt Ewell is coming up on the other side to hit the Union centre."

The two young officers pushed on as fast as their over-weighted steeds could carry them.

It was not a great while before, over the trees on the

mountainside, they saw the Confederate flag. A short while later distant bodies of troops in gray were seen.

They were closing up for the death-grapple with the foe. Will and Fred had now been sighted by videttes, and one of these hailed them.

The two boys held up their hands, and in a few moments they were with the vidette, who was astonished at the story they told.

"Yes," he declared, "Jackson is moving upon the foe by the flank. He is going to drive them if he can."

"Well, he can!" cried Will, confidently. "Have you seen anything of our company?"

The vidette was puzzled.

"What company?" he asked.

"Why, the Virginia Grays."

"No," replied the vidette. "I haven't been within the lines since daybreak."

The two young officers now rode on. They soon passed the outer line of pickets. The vidette had given them the countersign.

Into the lines they now rode. They saw the gray columns moving up in the evolutions necessary for a battle. Will's bosom swelled as he thought of the Grays, and how they would be anxious to get into action.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT AT CEDAR MOUNTAIN.

Now that the boys were in the lines their first thought was to report to General Jackson.

They saw nothing of the famous general, but enquiry located him on a nearby eminence with his staff.

He was directing the movements of his men, and did not see Will and Fred as they approached. The boy captain rode up and made a salute.

Jackson gave a gasp.

"Mercy!" he exclaimed. "Is that you, Prentiss? They told me you were dead."

"They told you wrong," said Will. "We are very much alive."

"So it seems. Did you deliver those papers?"

"We did, general. And it led to our being made prisoners in the Union army."

"Prisoners? What do you mean?"

"I mean that we were captured, and have only just now been rescued by a detachment of Stuart's."

"Whew!" exclaimed General Jackson, in genuine amazement. "This is a surprise to me. How were you captured?"

"Through the treachery of your trusted scout, Mr. Jim Weedon."

"Weedon? Jim Weedon?" gasped General Jackson. "Why, he is one of my staunchest men. I can't believe it of him."

"We can only tell you our experience."

With this the boys told their story, to which General Jackson listened with deep interest, but clouded brow.

"I understand now why Ewell did not co-operate with me in that first attack," he said. "However, I held the

foe with my division alone. We are going to drive them before the day is over. If I get hold of that scoundrel Weedon I'll have him shot."

"We are anxious as to the fate of our men," said Will. "We fear that they may have been captured."

"Captured? Indeed no!" replied General Jackson. "We came upon them this morning at the ford of the Rapid Ann. They are in our vanguard now."

It is hardly necessary to say that both Fred and Will were delighted. They could hardly wait to finish the interview with General Jackson.

Then they hurried away to find the Grays. As they were crossing the field Will saw a fat negro field hand coming toward him. With him was a negro boy.

The negro seemed excited, and started to the young captain. Fred noted this and exclaimed:

"That coon wants you, Will."

"Eh?" exclaimed the young captain. Then he gave a surprised cry. "Why, it's old Scipio!"

The negro was well known to Will. He had been a servant in the Prentiss household for nearly a generation.

He rushed up excitedly.

"Clar to goodness, Massa Will. I'se foun' yo' at last! I'se a glad nigger, I is. I tell yo' I hunts for yo' all ober Vargeeny an' I fin's yo' at last."

"Scipio," exclaimed Will, "what on earth has brought you here?"

"Massey Lordy, sah! Ah jest couldn't stay around home no longer, sah. It am too lonesome, an' I jest wants to go wif yo' an' help fight de Yankees."

This devotion on the part of the old fellow touched Will greatly. So many of the black people had proved disloyal and gone to the side of the Yankees that it was refreshing to find one true servant.

"Why, Scipio, you'd make too big a mark. Then, again, you couldn't stand the marches. You're too fat."

The negro rolled his eyes.

"Fo' de lan's sake, Massa Will, don' send me back home. Ah wants to stay wif yo' a lily while. Yo' ain't got nobody to take care of yo' fings. I keep dem all shiny, sah. Yo' jes' lemme stay wif yo' fo' lily while."

"What on earth have you got there with you?"

"Hi! Dat am mah lil' pickaninny. He am mah little Julius!"

"Well, well!" laughed Will. "On the whole, I'm glad to see you, Scipio. But you must keep back here until after the fight is over or you'll get shot."

"Ah jes' do wha' yo' tells me to, sah."

"All right. Keep back here in the shade somewhere until the battle is over. Then you can find me and my company, if there's anything left of us."

Scipio rolled his eyes in terror.

"Clar fo' goodness! Yo' ain't goin' out dar fo' to let dem no 'count Yankees kill yo', Massa Will? Don' yo' go fo' to do it, sah?"

Will laughed, and Fred joined in.

"Don't fear, Scipio! I'm not likely to take too many chances. I think we will come out all right."

Will and Fred now hastened away. In a few moments they saw their regimental colors once more, and there were the Grays, with Second Lieutenant Dick Walton directing their firing.

When the Grays saw their young captain and lieutenant safe and well they rose and cheered long and madly.

It was a joyful moment for all. They had been given up.

Certainly the two young officers had passed through a thrilling experience. But they had got back to their company safe and well, and for this they were indeed grateful.

Will at once took command. He quickly saw that there was going to be fighting of a desperate sort.

Colonel English now came along on his horse, and seeing Will, cried:

"Got back safely, Prentiss?"

"Yes," replied Will. "By the best of good luck."

"I am glad. Now, Prentiss, I want to tell you that we are apt to have a hard and bloody fight. We have got to drive Pope back into Washington in order to carry out Lee's plan of campaign."

"Then the first step is to drive Banks back from here?"

"Yes, and Porter as well! We are waiting for Ewell to come up. Hello! There are his guns now."

The distant booming of cannon was heard. That it was Ewell moving to the attack was certain.

General Jackson waited for no more. He proceeded to bring his men up.

The firing now became hot.

The artillery work on both sides was indescribably fierce. But the Confederates held their ground.

And now, when Ewell began to crowd Banks out of his position, Stonewall Jackson hurled his best veterans at the wing of Bank's army.

No human power could withstand the awful cannonade and the fierce charges of the Confederate army.

Slowly and surely, step by step, the veterans of Jackson's division drove the Union troops from their entrenchments. Soon they were in wild retreat.

After them went Jackson's men. Until dark the chase went on. Then the great Confederate general called a halt.

The vanguard had accomplished a startling achievement. They had descended upon the headquarters of General Porter so swiftly that no time was allowed that officer to carry away his personal effects.

Tents and baggage, papers and everything of value was captured. The Grays charged through the camp and seized everything.

Everything but the general himself. That shrewd officer had hurriedly made his escape.

The Grays were to encamp in the spot for the night. A number of prisoners had been captured. It looked almost as if Porter had abandoned the camp on purpose. In his tent were all his personal belongings, even to his uniform and sword.

The Grays had a score or more of prisoners. A halt had been called for the night, and Will ordered the Grays to occupy the enemy's camp. Fine well tents, with comfortable appointments, were yet standing.

Will, busy with matters about the camp, had not noticed Scipio and his pickaninny, who had entered the camp.

Some of the Grays who were fond of skylarking had plundered the tent of the Union general, and, bringing out the uniform of General Porter, had begun to rig Scipio out in it.

The negro was only too delighted, as was the pickaninny. The dress coat and boots and sword were all put on the negro's bulky form.

Then he was made to parade up and down the company street. Will came up at this moment, and Jackson himself, attracted by the cheering, rode up back of the line of Grays.

On one side were the prisoners under guard, on the other the Grays.

Scipio, attired in the uniform of the Union general found in the captured camp, certainly made an imposing appearance.

He strutted up and down in a manner to convulse the Grays with merriment, while even the prisoners were compelled to laugh.

Behind him was Julius, carrying a pail. He tried to imitate the strut of his father, but was unable to do so. Will laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, while General Jackson was greatly amused.

"Hit her up, old man!" shouted the Grays.

"Try the goose-step!"

"Right wheel! Carry arms!"

Scipio grinned in delight and made the spectacle as amusing as possible. It was all most absurd.

It must be said that the Boys in Gray were in good spirits that night. And why should they not be? They had won a decisive victory.

The camp that night was a scene of revelry.

Double lines of pickets were posted to guard against any possible return of the Union foe. But the truth was General Banks was too busy getting his scattered soldiers together to bother about a return attack.

"Well, Fred," cried Will, as he entered their captured tent and flung himself down upon a pile of blankets, "we've had excitement enough for one day, haven't we?"

"I should say we had," agreed Fred. "I thought we were goners, though, when Weedon snapped his clutches on us up there on the mountainside."

"It was a close call. I know one thing."

"What?"

"I shall sleep sound to-night. I was never so tired in my life."

Fred had sat down on a pile of knapsacks left behind by the former occupants of the tent in their hurried departure.

He was in a retrospective frame of mind. Will, half dozing on the blankets, looked at him and said, lazily:

"What's the matter with you, Fred? You look as if you had a love affair."

The young lieutenant laughed.

"Do I?"

"You certainly do."

"Well, perhaps I have. But, I say, she has the prettiest eyes I ever saw."

Will whistled and rose on his elbow.

"The deuce you say! Who is she?"

"The sutler's daughter."

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT FORAGING.

Will Prentiss looked at his young lieutenant and then laughed. Fred's face flushed angrily.

"What are you laughing at?"

"You," replied Will. "You fall in love with every pretty face you see. Oh, you are a flirt all right."

"I am not as bad as you," sniffed Fred. "My affairs are not serious."

"I hope not in this case. I understand she is spoken for."

"Oh!" said Fred, with a changing color. "I hope you are not such a fool as to think I am attracted by that girl. Why, she is a Yankee, anyway, and she wouldn't look at a Confederate like me."

"Oh, I don't know," said the boy captain languidly. "You would pass in a crowd, Fred. She might show worse taste."

The young lieutenant sprung up with a mock threat in his movements.

"I've a mind to make you swallow that, Will Prentiss."

"You can't do it. I'm your superior officer. Sit down!"

Mechanically Fred obeyed.

"You needn't be so sudden about it. Hello! what this?"

Sergeant Joe Spotswood stood in the tent entrance. He saluted, and Will asked:

"Well, Joe, what is it?"

"I reckon you might be interested, captain. I've just had news."

"News?"

"Yes, sir."

"What do you mean? What kind of news?"

Spotswood was one of those kind of fellows who can make you laugh with little effort. A gesture, a drawling sentence was with him quite sufficient. He illustrated his meaning by patting his stomach and then pointing at his thorax by placing a finger in his open mouth.

"Speak out, you Indian!" cried Will, who was already laughing. "What kind of a pantomime is that?"

"I know what he means!" cried Fred. "He has found something good in the line of forage."

"What?" cried Will, springing up and forgetting all about his weariness. "You don't mean it, Joe? I thought this region had been picked like a chicken's bones in a fox burrow."

"That's all right," said the orderly sergeant with a wink. "Trust Joe for finding the necessities of life. A good fat hog would be the saving of our lives, eh?"

The young captain and his lieutenant were now all in-

terest. Each felt his mouth water. Only those who have lived months on army "hard tack" and "salt horse," the name for salt pork, can really understand how they now felt.

"Are you in earnest, Spotswood?" asked Will, in a low tone. "You really know where there is a pig?"

"I do," replied Joe. "It's only two miles from here. The quartermaster sergeant will let me saddle one of his team horses. You have your horse. We can just ride out there and get the pig."

"Get him!" whistled Fred. "But how the deuce will we get him back? We can't drive him very well all that distance. Some other company would hustle him away from us."

"I'll show you how to bring him back," said Joe, tapping the handle of his knife. "We'll bring him back in pieces. I'm the slickest man to dress a pig you ever saw. The pig never makes a kick."

Will and Fred laughed. They quickly got ready for the trip.

Tired as they were with the day's hard fighting, they were still ready for the foraging trip.

The prospect of a nice meal of roast pig was tempting indeed.

"What's more," said Joe, "the old chap who owns the pig has a bushel of sweet potatoes. They'll roast bully in the ashes."

"Stop!" cried Will. "Don't say any more about it. The disappointment will be too great if we fail. How do we know but that some one else has already got there before us?"

"It's not likely," said Joe. "It's not an easy place to find."

"Oh, see here!" cried Fred. "How much does the old chap ask for his pig?"

"I dickered with him," said Joe. "He asked me twenty dollars in Richmond money and a musket."

"Then the pig is paid for?"

"Yes."

In a few moments all were ready for the excursion. There seemed little to fear, for the Union forces had suffered such a repulse that they were hardly able to do aught else but recuperate from the effects of their defeat.

Nothing was said to the rest of the boys. The three foragers stole quietly out of camp. Soon they were far beyond Jackson's picket line.

Joe had secured the countersign so that they would not have to call out the guard on their return.

On into the night they rode.

Joe Spotswood led the way on the team horse, which proved to be, after all, a fairly good saddle horse. Soon the lights of the Confederate camp were left far behind.

There was a wild spirit of adventure about the enterprise that appealed to the young officers greatly.

Spotswood led the way over the country through lanes and byways until finally he came to a halt. Just beyond a brush fence there twinkled a light.

Joe gave a peculiar whistle.

Then there was a creaking sound like the rusty hinge of an opening door, and the whistle was answered.

"Hello, the house!" called Joe.

"Hello, stranger!" was the reply. "Get down and come in."

"Is this the place, Joe?" asked Will.

"It is," replied the sergeant, "and I shall have the pleasure in a few moments of presenting you to the Honorable Mr. Jeff Woxworthy."

The boys followed the orderly sergeant through a small gate in the brush fence. They strode up a narrow walk to the door of a miserable little cabin made of odds and ends of lumber and brick.

In the door stood a man whose appearance betokened anything but prosperity or thrift.

His clothes were unkempt and dirty. They were of butternut homespun. A slouch hat full of holes covered his head.

He was smoking a stub of a pipe made out of the native clay, a material once used by the Indians. Jeff Woxworthy was not a man who cared much for personal cleanliness.

For his frowsy hair and beard looked as if they had never seen a comb, which indeed was very likely the case. But Mr. Woxworthy had redeeming traits for all that.

"You'uns are welcome," he said, simply. "Jest walk right in an' Missus Woxworthy will git ye a smack of whisky."

"Excuse us," said Joe, bluntly. "We don't drink, Mr. Woxworthy. I've come to get that pig and the potatoes."

"Oh, yes," said the farmer, rubbing his thin hands. "Will ye take it away alive?"

"Oh, no. We want to kill and dress it right here."

"Now that's too bad. Mirandy had plenty of hot water an hour ago, but she ain't got none now."

"Oh, we don't mind the hot water."

"But how will yer git ther bristles off?"

"We won't mind a little thing like that. Just trot his pigship out and I'll show you how to fix him up."

Woxworthy lit a lantern and accompanied the boys to a shed in the rear of the house. Here he flashed the rays into a pen where was as handsome a young pig as the boys ever saw.

It didn't take Joe long to kill the pig, and its carcass was strung up to some roof beams in the pen. He then dressed and quartered it adroitly.

In less than an hour the job was done. The orderly sergeant now turned to Woxworthy, who had watched the operation with interest, and asked:

"How do you like that, old chap?"

The farmer chuckled.

"You'uns kin slaughter all right," he said. "I reckon you learned the butcher's trade."

"Well, I'm familiar with it," said Joe. "Now the next thing is to load that meat on to our horses. I think we can rope it and sling it over our saddlebags."

"That's right, Joe!" cried Will. "Hello! What's that?"

Plainly to the ears of all came the tramp of horses' feet

and the rattle of sabres. Old Woxworthy shot out of the door. In an instant he returned with a livid face.

"Whar did ye leave yer hosses?"

Will and Fred looked at each other. Spotswood made reply.

"We left 'em down by the spring in a clump of bushes!" replied Joe. The farmer seemed relieved.

"Wall, mebbe they're safe. Ther yard is full of Yanks. I reckon they're raiders."

For a moment the young Confederates were appalled. It was an unwelcome development, to say the least.

They stared at the dismembered pig and then at the door. They knew the raiders would be sure to visit the pigpen. They must at once see the traces of the killing.

"Jerusalem!" gasped Joe, lugubriously. "We've lost our pig, boys."

"No!" cried Will. "Let us hide it! Have we time?"

"We haven't," said Joe, excitedly. "Do you hear them? They are coming."

The tramp of feet and voices were heard outside. Will started for the door.

"Quick!" he said, hoarsely. "A dash across the yard and down to the spring. We can easily get away then."

"Too late!" remonstrated Joe. But Woxworthy now came to the rescue.

That part of the shed in which they were now had a plank flooring. Beneath this was a space, perhaps two or three feet deep, between the timbers and the ground.

Quick as a flash the farmer stooped and lifted one of these planks.

"Here you are," he said. "Quick! Git down there while ye can."

It is needless to say that the boys needed no urging. They slid into the aperture like a flash. The plank closed down over them.

It was an uncomfortable position, to be sure. But the boys did not complain.

The next moment the shed door flew open, and in walked half a dozen Union cavalrymen. Their sabres clanked on the floor as they entered.

"Hello, old Sour Duff!" cried the leader, a burly fellow with a fierce mustache. "You're the chap we are looking for."

"All right," replied Woxworthy, cautiously. "What do youuns want here?"

"What do we want?" cried a Union officer, with bluster. "Can't you guess what we want? How many Confederate spies have you hanging around here?"

"I'm an honest farmer," whimpered Woxworthy. "I hope you'll not forget that."

"Yes, you look honest. Hello! What's that. Oh, I see. Been having a killing here, have you?"

And he walked up and placed his fingers on the yet warm carcass of the pig. There was a thrill of exultation in his voice.

Underneath the floor Will and Fred were electrified by the startling discovery that the Union officer was an old acquaintance.

In fact, he was no other than Colonel Eph Warden. The discovery for a moment appalled them, and they realized that they were in intense peril.

CHAPTER IX.

WOXWORTHY PROVES HIMSELF A HERO.

It is quite impossible to picture adequately the sensations experienced by the young Confederate officers under the floor.

What strange working of fate it was which had brought Warden to this place. For a moment the desire was almost irresistible to crawl out and throttle the dark scoundrel.

"Gee-whiz!" whispered Joe Spotswood. "Here's a hard go, Will. I wish I had him by the windpipe."

"Sh!" admonished the young captain. "He'll hear you."

"He'll find us, anyway."

"I hope not!"

In fact the boys saw that now all depended upon Woxworthy.

They knew the farmer to be a loyal son of the Confederacy. It was likely that he would, to a certain point, at least, defend the boys. But pressure might tell another story.

"Well, well!" said Warden, in his jeering way. "It seems to me that roast pig is a pretty big luxury for you Virginia crackers. Have you got another pig?"

"No," replied Woxworthy. "Youuns have stolen all the rest."

"That's a false accusation. It's plain that you are an enemy to the Union, and we are justified in seizing and retaining what we may find on your premises that is needed for our sustenance. That is military law from the days of Hannibal."

"Youuns kain't have it," said Woxworthy, obdurately. "I don't keer to sell."

"Then we'll take it, which is, after all, the cheapest way," said Warden, facetiously. "Here, boys, lay hands on the spoils. One of those hams is to be reserved for me. Do you understand?"

The cavalrymen sprang forward with alacrity to unhook the quartered pig. Woxworthy's protests were of no avail.

"All right," said Warden, finally. "As long as you make such a howl we'll reserve the brisket for you. That's all you'll get. Now, see here——"

Warden came to a stop. A queer expression came over his face. On the floor lay an object, which he now picked up.

It was a sword knot of the Confederate color, and Will Prentiss had dropped it when he dropped beneath the plank in the floor.

The Union colonel picked it up. His face was wolfish as he turned upon the farmer.

"See here, my friend, where did that Confederate sword knot come from which I just found on the floor?"

It was a moment of terrible suspense for the boys under the floor. To them everything seemed tottering. All depended upon Woxworthy.

In that moment neither Will nor his companions believed

that the farmer had the necessary keenness of wit to meet this contingency.

But they had reckoned wrong. Woxworthy's face was a blank. He stared at the sword knot and then at the Union colonel.

"It ain't mine," he said. "It belongs to you'uns."

"See here!" thundered Warden. "I'll make your old heels break your neck if you lie to me that way again. You know better than that. Where is the owner of that thing?"

Woxworthy's face was almost imbecile in its expression. He shook his head. The colonel ceased to bluster, but he began to cast his eyes about.

"There's some hocus-pocus here," he said. "Some Confederate officer has been here, and but a short while since. That pig was killed by some one who understands butchering. Tell me now, sir, where have you hidden the confounded spy? Tell me, or I'll hang you up by your thumbs."

Woxworthy was like a stone statue.

"I dunno," he said. "I dunno what yer mean?"

In vain Warden roared and blustered. Then, finding it of no avail, he finally grew calm.

"Search every nook about here," he said, turning to his men. "I'll find the owner of this thing if I have to dig up the whole country here."

It is hardly necessary to say that the boys were alarmed now.

This seemed to be quite the worst scrape they had yet figured in. They knew not what to do.

They heard the soldiers go tramping about the garden. When they thought of their horses not so very far away it seemed almost certain that they would be discovered.

But now Colonel Warden turned to Woxworthy and said:

"See here, my man. I have come here to-night to do you a kindness. Do you see? You like Uncle Sam's gold, don't you? Well, there'll be a good share of it for you if you do the right thing."

Woxworthy's eyes glittered.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Well, it's a little private business of mine. I don't care to have it known outside. I've brought a pretty girl here for you and your wife to take charge of."

"Kain't do it," said Woxworthy, emphatically. "Don't want it."

"But you will do it," growled Warden. "And I'll leave a guard of men here to see that you do. By and by I'll come back here with a preacher and marry her. See?"

"You kain't keep her in my house," declared Woxworthy. "I know jest what yer game is. The gal ain't willin' an' you are goin' to make her marry you agin her will. Ye kain't do it hyar."

The old man's voice rose to a high pitch. At that moment the boys in hiding felt like clapping their hands in approval.

"Bully for Woxworthy!" whispered Joe. "He is all right."

Warden's voice choked with passion as he said:

"You will take her, and care for her, too. I can't take her anywhere else to-night. I have got to get back to my regiment within an hour. If you refuse I'll burn your cabin about your ears."

Woxworthy made no reply.

"What is more," continued Warden, "I'll find those confounded spies you have hidden about here if I have to rip up every plank in your house."

For a moment the young Confederates under the floor felt a chill. It seemed as if they were bound to be exposed now.

But they were destined to learn that Warden was more bombastic than real. He stormed about the place for some moments and then left the shed.

Woxworthy followed, as did the guard. The boys, in suspense, waited what seemed an eternity.

It was fully an hour later, and they were nearly dead from their cramped position, when they heard the shed door open.

There was a footstep on the planks, and they heard breathing above. Then a silent whisper came down through the crack.

"You'uns needn't be a-skeered now. He's clean gone."

"Thank goodness!" gasped Joe Spotswood, as he put his back to the plank and raised it. "It's a relief to get out of this place, you bet."

"Well, I should say!" gasped Fred. "I am just about smothered."

The boys climbed out. Woxworthy stood beside them in the darkness.

"It's a durned shame," he whispered, "ye lost yer pig."

"That's right," exclaimed Will, but the farmer gripped his arm.

"Sh! Not so loud. You'uns will have to be keerful."

"What?" gasped Will, in surprise. "I thought you said they were gone."

"He's clean gone," replied Woxworthy. "But he's left a number of guards, and they're keeping watch of the house."

"And the girl—"

"She's in the house with Mirandy," said Woxworthy. "She's a durned putty critter. She kain't do nuthin' but cry. It seems they killed her father."

"The cowards!" ejaculated Will, forcibly. "Do you hear that, comrades? They have killed the old sutler and made a captive of his daughter."

Exclamations of rage and contempt escaped the lips of the others. It would have gone hard with Warden had he been present at that moment.

But he was not. However, a daring plan had occurred to Will.

"We can at least effect her rescue," he said. "We can take her away from here."

"If ye kin fool ther guards," said Woxworthy. "That's six on 'em, an' you bet they're right on edge."

There was a moment of silence while Will considered the situation.

The three boys were practically unarmed. Will had a

pistol and the others had knives. They had not dreamed of such a thing as needing their muskets on this trip.

They regretted now that they had not brought them.

"Well," said the boy captain finally, "there's only one thing we can do."

"What's that?"

"Creep down and get our horses and ride back to camp, and bring the Grays down here and surround the place."

"Bravo!" cried Fred. "That is the best possible plan. Also we might plan an ambush for Warden."

The prospect looked like a good one, but Woxworthy said:

"Ye won't have time."

"Time?" exclaimed Will. "Why not?"

"Bekase Warden expects to come back here in another hour an' bring his regiment. Ye couldn't git to yer camp an' back in time."

This was a dismaying bit of news. For a moment Will Prentiss was aghast.

But he was not the one to give up in face of such an obstacle.

"There is still a plan left," he said. "You must help us to execute that, Woxworthy."

The farmer nodded slowly.

"What is it?" he asked.

"You must manage to get the girl out of the house and smuggle her past the guard and down to the spring, where the horses are."

Woxworthy shook his head.

"Mebbe you'uns kin do it," he said. "I kain't see my way clear."

"See here, Woxworthy," said Will.

"Well?"

"Take us into the house and let us talk with the girl."

"You'uns kin do that all right; jest foller me."

The farmer opened a door which led into a passage way connecting the house and the shed.

In a few moments they had passed through this and entered the kitchen. Here they came face to face with Mrs. Woxworthy.

She was a motherly type of matron, and as Woxworthy presented the young Confederate officers she greeted them in a pleasant manner.

"We'uns are glad to see you'uns," she said. "It's too bad ye lost yer pig, but here's somethin' fer ye jest ther same."

The good housewife opened a pantry door and took out a platter, on which was a finely roasted chicken.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. WOXWORTHY'S HOSPITALITY.

It is hardly necessary to say that the sight of that daintily prepared chicken caused the boys to forget everything else.

Joe Spotswood had puckered out his lips to let out a whoop, when he happened to remember that it would not do.

"Chicken!" gasped Fred Randolph. "Do you see that,

Will Prentiss? Good roast chicken. I've seen nothing like that since I left mother and home."

"Well, I'll be a mother to ye for now," laughed Mrs. Woxworthy, as she quickly set a repast on the table. "Now, Woxworthy, you keep yer eye out that door fer them guards. Ther shutters are down, an' they kain't see in ther windows, but they might hear suthin' an' wanter come in."

"Hang the guards!" muttered Spotswood. "It would take the whole Union army to take me out of here now."

"Well, I should remark," put in Fred.

And the boys fell to with a will. In a short time what was left of the chicken would have made poor picking for crows.

Then Mrs. Woxworthy placed other things on the table. There were cakes and sorghum and pie. This was an unusual dish, it might be thought, for Virginia. But it was not a pie of the New England type. It was a 'possum pie.

When the boys finished the repast they felt brash enough to go out and fight the whole Union army.

But all the while Woxworthy had nervously kept his station at the crack in the door, watching the guards pacing up and down.

He turned now and asked:

"Be you'uns all done?"

"I think we are," replied Will. "I must say, I never ate so fine a meal in my life."

Mrs. Woxworthy blushed with pleasure. But the good farmer's face showed anxiety.

"I reckon ye'd better do somethin' soon," he said. "I feel a heap like as if them Yanks would come back poaty quick with a preacher."

"Do you think they could find a minister of the Gospel around here who would do anything of the kind?" asked Fred.

"Mebbe a nigger preacher," replied Woxworthy. "Would you'uns like to see the gal now?"

Will arose quickly.

Just then the door leading to the inner room opened. Mrs. Woxworthy entered, and with her was the sutler's daughter. Will was aghast at the change in her looks.

The fresh color which her face had held when he saw her last had vanished, and she was ghastly pale. Sorrow and suffering was in every line of her fair face.

She tried to recover herself in the presence of the young Confederates, and as she gave Will a glance of faint recognition a faint tinge of color returned to her cheeks.

"You are in deep trouble, Miss Mayfair," said the young captain, courteously. "We assure you of our deep sympathy."

"I thank you," she replied. "You are Confederate soldiers?"

"We are."

"It is hard for me to believe that there could be any among our brave boys of the northern army to so persecute one of my sex," she said. "I could stand insult to myself, but they have murdered my dear father, and my heart is bitter."

"You cannot hold your northern soldiers responsible for the act of one man," said Will. "There are villains in both armies."

"Yes, I presume that is true. But what am I to do? I am alone in this place, and now that my father is dead I have no one to befriend me."

"Yes, you have," replied Will, gallantly. "You may call on me and my comrades. We will stand between you and this cowardly villain with our lives."

Her face had begun to flush.

"I thank you from the depths of my heart," she said, with emotion. "Your words give me new hope."

Just then Woxworthy appeared in great excitement.

"I think I hear hosses trampin'," he said. "I reckon if ye're goin' to do anything ye'd better do it now."

For an instant Will Prentiss stood like one in a dream. At that moment he could see no clear way of getting out of the dilemma without a conflict with the guards outside. It was Mrs. Woxworthy who filled the gap.

"You stop your everlastin' clatter, Woxworthy," she said. "I hev a wrinkle to fool them guards. Jest listen to me."

She opened a closet door and produced a great stone jug. From the pantry she took some mugs.

"I'll fool 'em all right," she said, with confidence. "Tru a woman to fool a man every time. This jug holds cider, and I'm going to mull it with hot spices an' take it out to treat them guards. Now, Woxworthy, if you're not a fool you can smuggle these 'uns out ther side door while I'm foolin' them guards with ther cider. Git 'em out of sight of ther house as quick as the Lord will let ye!"

For a moment Will Prentiss felt giddy with delight at this apparent solution of the problem. For he knew that it would have, indeed, to be an orthodox guard who would refuse to desert his post for a moment when the inducement was mulled cider.

"Mirandy, you are a wonder!" declared Woxworthy, admiringly. "I believe ye'd fool ole Satan himself if he was to appear around here."

"Would I?" said the plucky housewife. "I'd break his head with the broom handle. An' I'll likely do that to that skulking Yankee colonel when he comes here ag'in."

Will Prentiss now turned to Caroline Mayfair and spoke words of hope. It did not take Mrs. Woxworthy long to mull the cider.

Then she opened the front door and boldly stepped out.

The guard lowered the point of his bayonet and sang out:

"Halt!"

"Oh, ye're afraid of a woman, are ye?" cried the farmer's wife. "Well, here's somethin' will give ye more courage."

She held the pitcher of cider up to the guard's nose. He caught the aroma and was lost.

"By gosh!" he exclaimed. "I hain't smelled nothin' like that since I left Bucksell, Maine. Do yer mean fer me ter have a taste of it?"

"In course," replied Mr. Woxworthy. "Do youuns

think we'uns ain't got no hospitality? Here! Don't be a pig. Call yer comrades up fer a drink, too."

"I'll jest take it around to 'em. They're on post, you know."

"No, ye won't! If they want it they kin come here an' git it."

The guard hesitated, and hesitating he was lost. He began to call the numbers of the other guards.

They came with alacrity. There seemed no harm in leaving their posts for a moment to get a sip of the cider. But that brief moment was fatal.

When Mrs. Woxworthy returned to the cabin she met her liege lord. He held up his hands and said:

"It's all up with we'uns now."

"What do ye mean?" she asked.

"They're clean gone. Now we'uns had better get out, too. That Yankee kunnel will kill us when he comes."

"No, he won't," said Mrs. Woxworthy, resolutely. "Nor he won't burn our house, muther. I believe that mulled cider is ther best fire insurance policy we ever had. Jest leave him ter me."

Meanwhile the fugitives had safely reached their horses. Joe and Fred rode double so that Caroline could have one of the horses. They galloped away at full speed.

They rode on, as near as could be judged, toward the Confederate camp. Once, as they were approaching a grove of oaks the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard ahead.

They had just time to draw out into the gloom of the roadside when a cavalcade swept past them. That it was a detachment of Union cavalry Will felt sure.

"Whew!" exclaimed Fred Randolph. "That was a close call for us. I wonder if that was Warden himself?"

"It may have been," said Joe Spotswood. "Hello! What's that?"

A great star of light shot up into the air far ahead. Another and another followed.

"They are signaling with rockets," declared Fred Randolph. "Do you know the code, Will?"

"I think I do."

They sat on their horses there in the gloom for some time and watched the rockets gleaming in the night sky. From their intervals of discharge Will deduced, according to the signal code, the following:

"Fall back to enemy's rear!"

"Of course we are not the only ones to see those rockets," said Will. "I have no doubt Jackson has read the signal as we have."

"What do you make of it?" asked Fred.

"Well," said Will, sagely, "it looks to me as if Jackson would not be able to hold his position for long. He will have to fall back in a day or two."

"Why?" asked Fred, in wonder.

"I think his line of communication will be in danger. There is no doubt that Baird will wing around and try to deal him a blow from the rear."

The reasoning of the boy captain was destined to find realization.

The little party now rode on more slowly. They were drawing nearer the Confederate lines and felt safer.

As Will rode along beside Caroline Mayfair he engaged her in conversation.

"What are your plans, Miss Mayfair?" he asked. "You will not now remain with the army?"

"No," she replied. "I will ask escort to our Union lines to-morrow. Then I shall return to my home in New York. I have relatives there with whom I can make a home."

"You will have little cause to fear Warden further?"

She shivered and replied:

"I am not so sure. He knows me and my affairs well. He can find me after his term of service is out."

"I would advise you to be always on your guard."

"You may rest assured I will be. But I shall be in a place then where the arm of the law will protect me."

"Very true," said Will. "I trust you will have a better opinion of the Southern people when you get home."

"I can assure you that I will always have the highest opinion of them," she said, warmly. "Especially of the Virginia Grays."

Just then a startling thing happened. A pistol shot rang out on the air. The horse the young girl rode reared and then went down with a bullet in the leg.

In an instant Will Prentiss was off his horse and assisting Caroline out of a dangerous position.

CHAPTER XI.

WILL RECEIVES A SURPRISE.

Fred and Joe Spotswood had instantly reined their horses in the direction of the shot. They discharged their own pistols at random.

But nothing of the unknown and cowardly marksman was to be seen. A crashing in the underbrush told that he was making tracks for safety.

Who he was and why he had fired at the party was never known. It was assumed, however, that he was a prowling guerilla.

Fortunately, Caroline was unhurt by her fall.

But a serious state of affairs now resulted. There were but two horses for the four riders.

It would be necessary for one of the party to walk. Also, progress must now be much slower, owing to this fact.

But the intense relief at the discovery that they were not attacked by a Union force, with the certainty of capture, caused the fugitives to ignore this.

Again they pushed on. As they drew nearer the Confederate camp their spirits rose rapidly.

Joe Spotswood even cut a wing dance in the middle of the road.

"We lost the pig, boys," he cried; "but we got the best dinner I've tasted since I left home and mother."

"Correct!" cried Will. "I'm perfectly willing to forego the pig. But there are the lights of the camp. We have made a night of it. See? The day is beginning to break."

This was true. A faint glow had begun to appear in the eastern sky. A gun sounded far off in the direction of the Union army. Did it mean an early call to arms?

The boys passed the picket line and now walked rapidly through the camp. But few beside the guards were astir as yet, however, and when the boys reached the camp of the Grays they found them also still sleeping.

Will gave up his tent to Caroline. The young girl was quite prostrated with the events of the night, and at once sought rest.

There was one besides the guards, however, who was astir, and this was the negro Scipio.

He came lounging up, and said:

"Golly, Massa Will, yo' don' seem to eber sleep. Mus' be you is a regular nighthawk. I jes' hab a lily surprise fo' yo', sah, fo' suttin."

"A surprise!" exclaimed the boy captain. "What is it, Scipio?"

"Yo' suah be pleased to know. But our young missy, yo' own sister Nellie hab come into camp. She am a spy, yo', know, an' she hab news for General Jackson."

Will felt a thrill of joy. His sister Nell was in the Secret Service of the Richmond government. When Will accepted his commission and marched away to the front Nell Prentiss was resolved to do what she could for the Confederacy, and took up the calling of a spy.

Will was glad, for more than one reason, that his sister Nell was in camp. He knew that she would be able to commune with the stricken young woman, Caroline Mayfair, and perhaps aid her to reach her friend.

"Where is my sister now?" asked the young captain.

"I dunno, sah! Spec's she am ober to General Jackson's headquarters. She done say she come back later."

Will was half tempted to visit headquarters.

Reveille was beating, and the great camp was astir. Far off in the distance the rattling fire of the skirmishers showed that the day's fighting was about to begin. Jackson had announced his intention to hold the captured trenches of Cedar Mountain. So preparations were made to hold them.

But as the morning hours wore away it seemed as if the foe had changed their tactics and had no intention of returning to the attack.

Far off to the east their columns seemed to be in motion. For a time this was puzzling to Jackson.

The Grays had received a few hours of rest. But now they were once more ready for action.

They had just answered roll call, and Will Prentiss was consulting with Fred Randolph when a white horse dashed up. On its back was a slender female rider. Will turned and gave a great cry of joy.

"Nell, my sister!" he cried.

In a moment the young girl had dropped from her horse and was in her brother's embrace. It was a happy meeting.

"You look prettier than ever, Nell!" cried the boy captain, as he kissed his sister. "Where have you been since I saw you last?"

"I have just come from Washington," replied the girl spy. "I have delivered important information to General Jackson. I have been west also."

"Well, I am glad to see you. It does not look as if the war would end for a long while, does it?"

"I am sorry to say it does not, brother. But so far victory has sided largely with the Confederacy."

"That is true. But I have something to tell you, Nell. There is a young woman in this camp now. She is a northern girl. Her father was a sutler in Pope's army. A villain named Warden has persecuted her with odious proposals of marriage. He had murdered her father and had abducted her. We rescued her and brought her here. Perhaps you can help her."

Nell's face brightened with eager interest.

"If it is in my power I will gladly do so," she said.

Will now led the way to the tent occupied by Caroline Mayfair. As they approached she had just parted the flap and stepped out.

She smiled and flushed at sight of Will and his sister. Her gaze was fixed eagerly upon Nell.

"Miss Mayfair," said Will, courteously, "allow me to present you to my sister, Miss Nellie Prentiss."

The two girls advanced and spoke words of greeting. The dark-haired northern girl was in striking contrast with her fair-haired sister of the South.

But it was hard to tell which was the most beautiful. They were friends on the instant.

Will left them to converse with each other. Orderlies were riding up and down, giving orders to the different colonels. It was evident that some move of importance was on the tapis.

One of the orderlies rode up and called loudly:

"Is this the regiment of Colonel English--the First Virginia Volunteers?"

"Yes," replied a dozen voices. "Colonel English is over yonder."

"I want Captain Will Prentiss, of the Virginia Grays. I have a despatch here for him from General Jackson."

In an instant Will sprung forward.

"Here I am!" he cried.

The orderly handed him the despatch and galloped away. Will read it with much interest.

"My Dear Prentiss: I intend to hold my position here, if possible, until Lee crosses the Rapid Ann. It clears the way to our northward advance. I have, however, been informed by a female spy who has just come from the enemy's camp that Porter is moving around to try and cut our line of communication in the rear. Now, I want you to take your men and reconnoiter along the banks of the Rapid Ann southward for some distance. Send me word instantly if you are apprised of any move of the enemy in that direction, for I must at once retreat if such is the case. Report to me at your earliest possible moment.

(Signed) "JACKSON, General Commanding."

Will Prentiss read this with deep interest. He did not lose a moment.

He turned and called to Fred:

"Call out the company! Prepare for a long march!"

At once the roll sounded. Out came the Grays ready for business. In a very short space of time they were in line and ready for the march.

Nell Prentiss and the sutler's daughter stood by the tent entrance as Will came up hurriedly to get his sword and pistols.

"Have you orders, Will?" asked Nell.

"Yes," replied the boy captain. "We are off for a scout down the valley of the Rapid Ann. I shall have to leave you both, much to my regret. But you will be safe here until my return, and—"

"Wait a moment," interposed Nell. "Is not your scouting trip back along your line of communications with Gordonsville?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, we beg to go with you. I have some business in Gordonsville. Miss Mayfair fears to return to the lines of the Northern army as yet. She prefers to remain on this side of the line for a time. Now, you know the Cliffs, of Gordonsville, don't you, Will?"

"Why, certainly! Major Cliff is one of my father's best friends. His son Byron is in charge of our transportation train, with the rank of second lieutenant. He is now somewhere in our rear guarding the supplies."

"So I thought," said Nell. "Now, I feel sure I can leave Miss Mayfair with the Cliffs at Gordonsville. Mrs. Cliff will certainly care for her until she is able to return to her friends in the north."

"She will certainly do so," cried Will. "I feel very sure of it."

There were tears in Caroline's eyes.

"For all your kindness I can never make return," she said.

"You need not think of that," said Nell. "It is our pleasure. Have you a horse for Miss Mayfair, Will?"

"I have," replied the boy captain.

Orders were given for a horse to be brought up for Miss Mayfair. Nell mounted her own white steed.

The Grays were already in line of march. Will and the two young women rode ahead.

The little company of Grays were soon following the road to Gordonsville. Here, at intervals, they encountered the supply trains of Jackson's army.

It was interference with these that the general feared. If Porter or Banks should swing about and suddenly break this line of communication with the rear Jackson would be cut off and would stand in great danger of defeat.

For some miles the Grays marched on. They now came to a part of the road which led through a rocky cut.

Suddenly the distant volleying of firearms smote upon their ears.

Joe Spotswood, who had been on ahead with a small advance guard, now came running back with alarm.

"Captain Prentiss," he cried, "the enemy has shown up in force and is attacking a supply train over there in the cut."

"Guerillas?" asked Will.

"I don't know."

"It is probably some of Porter's cavalry," declared Fred in alarm. "We had better go down there at once, Will."

CHAPTER XII.

DEFENDING THE WAGON-TRAIN.

"Forward, Grays!" cried the young captain.

The Grays answered at once. With a cheer and with bayonets fixed they went forward on the run.

As they now drew nearer the cut they saw a small guard of the wagon train desperately fighting and holding at bay a large force of guerillas.

Will was relieved to see that they were not of the regular Union army. The blow at Jackson's communications had not yet been struck.

"Forward, Grays!" shouted Will. "Give 'em the cold steel."

The guerillas saw the Grays coming, but they did not desist. They advanced fiercely, trying to beat down the guard of the wagon train.

In a few moments the Grays were on the spot. Then they gave the guerillas a volley.

It shattered their line, and for a moment caused them to fall back. From the line of defense behind the wagon train sprung a tall, handsome youth.

"Will Prentiss!" he cried. "I am glad to see you. You have come just in time."

"Byron Cliff!" cried Will. "You have been making a brave defense."

"We could not have held out much longer. You have saved us."

"Not yet! They are coming back."

This was true. The guerillas were returning to the attack fiercely.

They seemed determined to carry the train. Fiercely they came on, but once again the volleys of the Grays drove them back.

This time they did not return.

They scattered and disappeared. The wagon train was saved.

But so many of the horses had been shot that it became necessary to camp and wait for a fresh relay.

In the meantime it was deemed best for the Grays to remain and guard the train for a time.

As soon as the guerillas had drawn off and the fight was over attention was first given to the wounded.

During the fight Nell Prentiss and the young Northern girl, Caroline Mayfair, had given their attention to the wounded and done all in their power to aid them.

Young Lieutenant Cliff, handsome and flushed with the excitement of the fight, now came up and tipped his hat to Nell.

"Miss Prentiss," he said, "this is an unexpected pleasure."

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Cliff," replied the girl spy. "I think the last time I met you was in Richmond."

"Ah, yes! At the Home Guards' Ball. I remember our last dance. We little thought then that there would really be war."

"That is true."

Byron Cliff's gaze suddenly rested upon Caroline Mayfair. It chanced that the fair Northern girl had also been looking toward him.

It was their first meeting.

But Byron Cliff stood spellbound. A curious sensation came over him. Nell Prentiss had always seemed to him one of the most beautiful of young women. But here was one whom he was bound to deem fairer than she.

Color mantled the pale face of Caroline and her eyes fell.

Nell quickly exclaimed:

"Oh, pardon me! I have the pleasure to introduce to you Miss Caroline Mayfair—Lieutenant Byron Cliff."

The young officer bowed low.

"I am deeply honored," he said. Then he looked inquiringly at Nell, who smiled and said:

"Miss Mayfair is a Northern young woman. Her father was sutler in Pope's army, but he was killed, and she was rescued from the power of a villain by my brother."

Then, in closer detail, Nell told the story. Byron Cliff listened with the deepest of interest.

"The man was a scoundrel," he said, tensely. "I sympathize with you, Miss Mayfair. I assure you my sword and services are yours in defending you against his villainy."

"I thank you," replied Caroline, with gentle dignity. "Every one has been so kind to me. I hope soon to be able to repay."

"Nonsense, child!" cried Nell, playfully. "There is no obligation. Wouldn't you do the same for me if I was in your position within the lines of your army?"

"This is a cruel war," said Caroline.

"It is that," declared Lieutenant Cliff, earnestly. "I shall be glad when it is over."

Just then there came a startling report that the guerillas were returning to the attack in greater force. At once Cliff hastened away.

This time the guerillas came on with the intention plainly of carrying the wagon train. They rode down at full gallop, firing their carbines and yelling like Indians.

But the Grays, with most commendable coolness, fought them back. The ground was covered with horses and men as they poured volleys into the guerillas' ranks.

"I should think they'd get enough of it soon," cried Joe Spotswood, as he bit off a fresh cartridge and rammed it home. "Give it to 'em, boys!"

For half an hour the battle raged hotly. Then the guerillas retired, and this time they did not return.

Many of the Grays had been shot, and the two girls were busy attending to their wounds.

All was excitement and confusion. Nightfall was at hand, and there was nothing left but to bivouac upon the spot till morning.

So the Grays proceeded to do so; a temporary hospital was made of the wagon covers for the wounded. Nell and Caroline worked until nearly exhausted, caring for the wounded.

But there was one patient whose eyes followed the young Northern girl wherever she went.

Byron Cliff had been shot in the arm. Tenderly Caroline had bound up the wound. She hovered over him, while the delicious charm of her presence banished his pain.

That night in the camp there was little sleep for any.

The care of the wounded and the apprehension of another attack by the guerillas kept all awake.

In the morning a relay of horses arrived and a fresh squad of train guards. The Grays now proposed to resume their scouting trip down the river.

In the meantime new plans had been made.

Nell had proposed to accompany the wounded lieutenant, Byron Cliff, to his home in Gordonsville. His wound was too serious to enable him to continue with his command.

This brought up the subject of Caroline's future. At once Cliff proceeded to argue that she could not go back north yet, and it would be better for her to seek a temporary home in Gordonsville.

"My mother will be glad of your company," he cried. "My sister, who was much like you, died not long since. You can take her place."

At first Caroline would not yield. The chief inducement was furnished by Nell, who offered to go with her.

So it was planned that Nell and Caroline, with the wounded lieutenant, should go on to Gordonsville. Caroline should remain with the Cliffs until a suitable opportunity was offered to return North.

A strong escort was furnished them, and the start was made. The wounded lieutenant was carried on a litter between two horses.

Then the Grays turned their face southward on their scouting trip. As they rode on and soon passed beyond their own outposts a sharp lookout was kept for the enemy.

Until the hour of noon they reconnoitered the region well. It was then that, as they were crossing a little creek, Joe Spotswood gave a sharp cry:

"Look yonder!" he said.

All eyes were turned in the direction indicated. It is hardly necessary to say that all gave a start of horror.

To the limbs of a large oak were hung four corpses. In the morning air they dangled, a hideous spectacle.

The Grays marched nearer. Fred Randolph gave a horrified exclamation:

"That is Norwood, one of our spies!" he cried. "I don't know the others."

Beneath the tree the imprint of horses' hoofs were seen. It was plain that a large body of mounted men had been on the spot within a few hours.

But the dead men hanging there on the tree could tell no tales.

"That is tough," said Joe Spotswood.

"It is only what a spy must expect if he falls into the hands of the foe," said Sam Payton.

"That's right," agreed Fred Randolph.

Just then a series of terrified yells in the rear of the company caused all to turn.

Running toward them with all his might, and the picture of abject terror, was Scipio. On even terms with him was the pickaninny.

At first Will was sure that the foe was coming up in the rear. The order was already upon his lips to deploy in line of battle.

But the next moment he saw what was the cause of Scipio's agitation.

The coon's face and head were literally covered with a swarm of bees. They were about him as thick as could be, and the agony of the poor negro was intense.

Will sprung down from his horse and grabbed his blanket. With this he buffeted some of the bees away and then cried:

"Jump into the creek, Scipio! This way! Take a dive!"

The coon, in spite of his frenzy, was able to hear this. He instantly obeyed. He jumped into the water, and the bees relaxed their hold upon him.

But, when the coon emerged he was a sight to behold.

The little torments had stung him in hundreds of places. His face and head began to swell up twice their natural size.

"Golly fo' glory! I'se done killed. Dis chile am all dead! Massy Lordy! I'se done killed!"

The wails of the negro were intense. But now that it was all over there were certain heartless members of the company of Grays who were disposed to roll upon the ground and yell with mirth.

The pickaninny explained how it happened.

"Yo' see we jes' turned into dat little lane ober dere," he said. "And we berry quick come to a house."

"A house!" exclaimed Will. "A house near here?"

"Yes, sah! Dat am it ober dere!"

Will and the others looked, but they saw nothing of the house. But the pickaninny went on:

"Dere was an ole white woman ober dere an' she cum to de do' an' tell ma dad dat she ain't got nuffin' fo' niggers to eat. Dey was all in wid de Yankees. But when my dad he done tell her dat he was wif de Confederates she say: 'Oh, yes! Ah show you whar dar am some nice sweet hams. Yo' jes' go down dere an' run your arm into dat hole in de wall an' pull 'em out.'

"Yo' bet dad was glad. He went down and run his arm into de hole in de wall. I heerd suttin' kinder singin' laik an' I jes' stan' back. Pooty quick dad, he say: Huh! Dey am no hams in yere. Only jest some mushy stuff. Den he pull out a great big honeycomb. Golly, de bees dey come wif it. Yo' bet ah jes' got out ob de way, an' dey jest lit on dad like fire."

Then the little coon doubled himself up and laughed until he almost went into spasms.

The poison of the stings had caused Scipio's face and head to swell enormously. Will applied all the natural remedies he could think of.

The coon groaned with pain, but still pluckily kept on his feet. But Fred Randolph had now begun to feel an interest in the house and its female owner.

He said to Will:

"Let us go over and see what sort of a place that is. I really feel interested."

"All right," agreed Will.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE HOUSE BY THE CREEK.

So Will and Fred, followed by some of the boys, crossed the creek and turned into the little lane.

In a few moments they came in sight of the house.

It was a structure of the usual Southern type, built of boards, and with a wide porch. Will saw that the owner was thrifty and neat.

He walked up to the porch.

Before he could get the door opened a woman came out. She was of middle age and neatly dressed. She beamed at Will over her spectacles.

"Madam," said the boy captain, "my colored servant came here a short while ago—"

"Yes, I saw him," said the woman, quickly. "I reckon he got into trouble."

"I don't think it was very kind of you to play such a trick upon him."

"You are mistaken, captain," said the woman. "I was sincere with him. The unfortunate part of it is that he made a mistake."

"A mistake?"

"Yes. I told him to go down to the buttery and put his hand through a hole under the wall and he would find a couple of hams there. I hid them so they would be safe from the Yankees."

The woman spoke with earnestness, and light began to dawn upon Will.

"Oh, I see! He went to the wrong place."

"Yes. You see a swarm of bees have hived in the stone wall down there. If you will come with me I will show you where the hams are."

The woman, who gave her name as Mrs. Delmont, led the way through the garden to a little frame building which she designated as the buttery.

She reached under the stone foundation and drew out two fine hams. All doubts of Will's vanished.

"It was a mistake on Scipio's part," he said. "He did get awfully stung."

"That is too bad. I'm dreadfully sorry. If he will come to the house, I have some stuff we use for bee stings that will fix him all right."

"I'll send him up," said Will. "By the way, Mrs. Delmont, have you seen anything of the Yankees about here lately?"

The woman shook her head.

"Not for several days," she said.

Will was staggered.

"Are you sure of that?" he asked.

"I am."

"Don't you know that just across the creek there four men are hanging to a tree? That those men were hung there by the Yankees?"

The woman looked at him squarely and made reply:

"It's the first I've heard of it."

Will Prentiss was astonished. He looked at the woman keenly. Up to this moment he had not distrusted her.

Now, however, he felt a chill of distrust.

It occurred to him that she was telling an untruth. If she was lying he could not help but believe that she could throw light on the mysterious fate of the spy and his companions.

"See here, Mrs. Delmont," he said, sternly, "this is a serious matter. How could anything of that sort happen so near your house and you not know it?"

"I don't concern myself with what is going on outside my dooryard," she said.

"Oh, you don't?"

"That's what I said."

"I can't believe you. There must have been a great deal of noise connected with the hanging of those men."

"I don't keer if there was. I don't know anything about it, and I care less. They might have been hung two days ago. I was away then."

"As a matter of fact they were hung a few hours ago," said Will. "I think you know something about it, madam."

"I don't keer what you think!" snapped the woman. "I'll thank you and your gang to get off my premises."

"Not until we know whether any of the Yankees are concealed about here," said the young captain.

The woman started for the house without further word. Will gave a quick order to Spotswood.

"Bring the men up and surround the place."

In an instant this was done. The young captain was now confident that there was something wrong about the woman, and her manner showed it.

He carefully examined the lane. There were hoof marks in the earth, showing plainly that the same cavalcade of horses present at the hanging had entered the yard of Mrs. Delmont's place.

Will called Fred's attention to this.

"That's right," he muttered. "Queer, isn't it? Do you suppose she is connected with the affair?"

"I have my suspicions. I think we had better investigate the place."

"So do I."

"There are too many traitors in the Confederacy now. Some of them should be made an example of."

"I agree with you."

Will now called Spotswood. The young orderly sergeant appeared.

"Joe," said the young captain, "take a squad of men and search that house."

"All right, sir."

Joe Spotswood was always zealous to obey an order. It did not take him long to pick out a squad and approach the house.

But just as they reached the door it opened. In the doorway stood Mrs. Delmont with a shotgun.

Her face was rigid and white. Her eyes gleamed dangerously.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"Madam," said Joe, respectfully, "we dislike to put you to trouble. But it's the captain's orders to search your house."

"Oh, it is, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll tell you that you come over this threshold at your peril. This gun is loaded with buck and ball, and I'll shoot the first one of ye."

There was a ring in her voice that indicated that she was in earnest.

For a moment Joe hesitated.

"Madam," he said, "I'm a soldier, and a soldier must always obey orders. I know you're a woman, and hate to bother you, but I have got to search your house."

"Well, you won't search it."

At this moment Will stepped up.

"What is this?" he asked.

"I want you to call off your dogs," declared the woman. "You're trespassing on my property. You've no right here. Now get out."

"If we learn that we have misjudged you we will apologize," said Will. "But I assure you, madam, if you are loyal to the South you will not refuse us. What is your reason?"

"My house is clean, and I am not going to have a lot of dirty, thieving soldiers tramping through it!" she snapped.

"I ask you only that a sergeant and one other man may be given admittance."

"Well, they can't! Now get out!"

She raised the gun threateningly. But Joe, who had been watching his chance, now gripped the barrel.

The move caused the trigger to compress in her hand and the gun exploded. But the shot went into the air. The woman fought like a tigress.

But she was held firmly, and Joe and his men entered the house. As they stepped into the sitting-room they were amazed.

The place was a veritable arsenal. Guns were stocked in hundreds against the wall. There were chests of ammunition, and the table in the centre of the room was strewn with cards.

Bottles of wine, fresh opened, and glasses were on the table.

It was apparent that some party of revellers had just been frightened away. That they were yet in the house the young Confederates had no doubt.

Will Prentiss, who had pushed into the room, was startled.

At once he gave quick orders to secure every door and strengthen the guard outside. A door at the end of the room was closed and barred.

Joe Spotswood tapped on it and said:

"Kindly open the door and save trouble."

There was no answer.

"Smash it in, boys!" he said.

The Grays needed no second bidding. Quick as a flash they stepped up to the door and with their musket butts burst it in.

As the panels crashed inward a startling scene was revealed.

In the center of the room stood four Union soldiers. They held muskets aimed at the invaders.

A stern voice said:

"Stand back! We will sell our lives dearly! We will fire!"

"You are surrounded," said Joe. "There is no escape for you. You might as well surrender!"

"Surrender!" said a feeble voice from the corner of the room. "Well, I don't want you to sacrifice your lives for me, boys. Let them come. Lay down your arms!"

The four soldiers of the Union guard obeyed. Will Prentiss was the first to step into the room.

On a bed which stood near the window he saw a white-haired man, whose face, though pallid and drawn with suffering, was patrician and handsome.

On the wall hung a Union uniform. And Will saw that the shoulder-straps of a brigadier general were upon it.

The young captain advanced to the bed. The man in the bed looked at him keenly and saluted.

"Captain, I am your prisoner," he said. "I fear, though, you will have to accept my parole, for I am too badly wounded to accompany you."

"General," said Will, courteously, "I will hope not to disturb you seriously. Is your wound a serious one?"

The general lowered the sheet and showed a bandage on his side.

"I fear it will prove a mortal one," he said. "I got it the first day at Cedar Mountain. I rode with my brigade as far as here. They have, by my orders, gone back to report to General Banks."

"Ah!" said Will, quietly. "You were left here with a guard."

"Yes! The faithful woman who owns this place and has given me refuge here is a relative. She is my wife's sister."

"I am Captain Will Prentiss, of the Virginia Grays."

"I am Brigadier General Mayfair, of the First New Jersey Volunteers."

Will gave a great start, and an exclamation escaped his lips.

"Mayfair!" he exclaimed. "The name is familiar to me."

"Indeed!" said the wounded man, with a faint show of interest. "There are many of the name in New Jersey."

"But I came across it right in your own camp at Cedar Mountain while I was held there for a brief time as a prisoner."

"In our own camp?" exclaimed the general.

"Yes! Joseph Mayfair, I believe. He was a sutler, I think."

The general's face lighted up, and he said:

"He is my brother."

CHAPTER XIV.

WILL MAKES A PROMISE.

Will Prentiss was never more astonished in his life than at this declaration of the wounded general.

"You Joseph Mayfair's brother?" he gasped.

"I am such. What do you know of him? Were you an acquaintance?"

"No!" replied Will. "But his daughter has been in my charge."

General Mayfair half rose on his pillow.

"His daughter?" he exclaimed. "Do you mean Caroline?"

"I do."

"What—how was she kept in your charge?"

"Through force of circumstances. Her father is dead."

A half-stifled cry escaped the wounded general. For a moment the agony of grief contorted his face.

"Dead! My brother Joe dead!" he groaned. "Oh, that is awful."

For some moments he was silent. Then he seemed to grow composed and, looking at Will more calmly, said:

"You will forgive me; but my brother was very dear to me."

"I understand," said Will. "His death was under sad circumstances."

"It was not in action. He was not in the service, you know."

"No; I hesitate to tell you."

"Do not hold it back, I beg of you."

"He was murdered!"

"Murdered?"

"Yes."

For a moment General Mayfair's fingers worked convulsively. He looked at Will in a searching way.

"I think I know," he said. "It was the work of Eph Warden."

"Yes!"

"The scoundrel was here but a few hours ago," he said. "He brought me despatches from General Banks. A hospital corps was to come here and remove me on the morrow."

"Oh!" said Will, with a deep breath. "You say that Warden was here but a few hours ago?"

"Yes."

"That explains the marks of horses' hoofs all around the place. It shows that a troop has lately been here."

"Just so."

"Tell me, General Mayfair, did he hang four men to a tree on the other side of the creek?"

"He did," replied General Mayfair. "It was against my orders, though one of them, I believe, was a spy."

"That explains all," said Will. "You say a hospital corps is soon to arrive for you?"

"On the morrow, I believe. Warden will return here to-night with a guard of men. When I see him—lightning blazed from the wounded general's eyes. "When I see him we shall settle the score. It is his life or mine."

"Calm yourself," said Will. "Have no fear of that. We shall see that he is dealt with as he deserves."

"Pardon me," said Mayfair, sinking back on his pillow. "I forget that I am a prisoner."

"You shall have every courtesy," said Will.

"I thank you, sir. I am, in spirit, a Southern man myself. But my regular army training led me to espouse the cause of the North."

"There are noble men in both armies," said Will.

"That is well spoken, my boy. This war is an unholy strife. Some day all will see what a great mistake it is."

"I agree with you, sir."

"Listen," said the wounded man, bending over feverishly. "You want to capture Warden, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Then remain here. He will be back here surely before many hours. Entrap him as he rides into the yard."

"That is my plan."

"If I were strong enough I would ask you to let me pull the cord which closes about his cowardly neck."

"You should have that privilege if you were strong enough."

"Strong! Ah! I shall never be strong again," said the wounded man. "This cut in my side—it is the work of a shell. I can feel the poison eating into my system. In a little while I shall pass to my fathers."

His voice fell to a husky monotone. One of the guards who stood near reached for water, but Will intercepted him and laved the sufferer's fevered brow himself.

After awhile Mayfair looked up and asked:

"What of my niece? What of Caroline?"

"She is safe in Gordonsville," said Will. "She is in my sister's care."

"And you have taken all this kindly interest in her?"

"Why should I not?"

"You shall have your reward," said General Mayfair. "I feel that I can trust you, Captain Prentiss. In the secret pocket of my uniform coat you will find valuable papers. They entail a considerable fortune in New Jersey—my all! It amounts to one hundred thousand dollars. Swear to me that you will deliver those papers to her."

"I swear!" said Will, fervently.

"God bless you!" said the fevered man, sinking back on his pillow. "I ask—no more! Let the end come!"

Will arose silently and went out of the room.

As he passed the threshold he met Mrs. Delmont. The woman's manner had changed. She seized Will's hand, and tears coursed down her cheeks.

"I did not think you would be so kind," she said. "I ask your pardon for my rough conduct. But he is my brother-in-law, and I could not bear to think of him as a prisoner."

"Have no fear, madam," said Will. "He will never leave this house a prisoner."

She looked at him and comprehended. She bowed her head in her apron and wept. Will passed out of the house.

He met Joe Spotswood at the door.

"Captain," asked the sergeant, "what orders have you?"

"That fellow Warden is coming back here," said Will. "I want you to bring the boys back into the yard, so as to make an ambush. When he rides in with his troop surround him and make him surrender."

"I'll do it," cried Joe. "I'd like to see him hang from the same tree where those poor chaps hang."

"We will hang him if we get him."

Will then went back into the house. Mrs. Delmont was busy attending to the sick man. For a time Will was busy looking over captured papers which he had found in the general's effects.

Some of these were of value, and he felt justified in confiscating them.

For some time he was thus occupied, when suddenly Mrs. Delmont came from the inner room.

"Come quick!" she whispered. "I am afraid the end has come."

Will lost no time.

He rushed to the bedside of the dying man. A glance was enough. Once the dying general tried to speak.

But as Will bent over him he saw the eyes set and the jaw fall. He was dead.

When the young captain left the room he carried the valuable papers which were to be delivered to Caroline Mayfair.

Mrs. Delmont's grief was great. But when the young captain started to leave the house she faced him.

"I want to ask of you a favor," she said.

"Well?" asked Will.

"You are going to take those papers to my niece. It will make her a rich woman."

"Yes."

"Cannot I go with you and join her? She is alone in the world, and so am I. My husband was drafted and was shot at Malvern Hill. There is nothing for me here now. Do not refuse me."

"You shall go," said Will. "I have no doubt your niece will be glad to have you live with her. She, you know, is quite alone in the world."

"You will go from here to Gordonsville?"

"I cannot say yet. I am under orders at present. It is likely, though, that General Jackson will fall back. In that case I shall hope to see your niece before many days."

"I do not mind. I can ride and am used to camp life."

"Then you are welcome to accompany us."

Just then Will heard a startling sound outside. There was a clatter of horses' hoofs. He sprung to the door.

Into the yard had dashed a cavalcade of Union cavalrymen. There were a score in all.

At their head rode a man whom the young captain recognized instantly. Will stepped back as Warden dismounted.

The Union colonel crossed the porch with a bound.

He came to a startled halt in the doorway. Before him, with folded arms, stood Will Prentiss.

"Ah!" said the young captain. "I am pleased to see you, Warden."

"The deuce!" gasped the villain. "You! What brought

you here?" He turned his head with a chill of alarm. From the shrubbery on every hand a line of gray uniforms had appeared.

Muskets covered the blue-clad riders. A stern voice called out:

"Stand and surrender!"

There was no help for it. The wall of infantry which surrounded them caused the Union cavalrymen a chill.

At once they dismounted and yielded up their arms.

Aghast; the villain Warden gazed upon the scene and then at Will.

"Perdition!" he gritted. "You have trapped me!"

"You are right," said Will, coolly. "The best thing you can do is to surrender at discretion."

For a moment the cowardly colonel seemed to hesitate. But at that moment Joe Spotswood bounded on to the porch.

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH IS THE END.

The young orderly sergeant had come at a signal from Will. The villain Warden saw that the game was up.

"I yield!" he said. "I demand the privileges of an officer subject to exchange."

"You will receive the justice due a murderer," said Will coolly.

Ghastly white, Warden clutched at the door-jamb.

"W-what's that?" he gasped. "No, no! You won't hang me!"

"Just as quick as we can get you across the creek to join your victims on the tree," said Will.

"But—this is not justice! You can't hang me. I demand a fair trial."

"You'll get all the trial you deserve. You admitted killing Joseph Mayfair in cold blood. His brother yonder lies dead with a curse on you still on his lips."

For a moment Warden seemed about to collapse. He was bound and led away under guard.

The Union soldiers with him were disarmed and their horses confiscated. Then Will gave orders for a grave to be dug in the garden of the house.

Into this the remains of General Mayfair were placed. A volley was fired over the grave in honor of the brave man, though he was their foe.

It was now fast approaching evening. One of Warden's troopers had said:

"Your men are coming back! Banks has driven Jackson from Cedar Mountain."

But Will knew what this meant.

He knew that Jackson, after holding his captured position for two days, was disposed to fall back to save the cutting of his communications.

This was a necessary and politic move. The young captain knew that it was now his duty to return and report to Jackson.

After General Mayfair's burial the young captain addressed the Grays.

"Comrades," he said, "we have just made prisoners of

a Union detail. One of them is Eph Warden, a murderer and a spy and villain. Justice demands that he be hung."

A cheer went up from the throats of the little company. "Yes, yes! Hang the murderer!"

"Spotswood, you may take a squad and lead the prisoner across the creek. Hang him up beside the poor victims of his own malevolent cruelty."

"No, no, no!" begged the villain piteously. "Oh, don't hang me! Spare my life! Don't kill me!"

For a moment Will hesitated.

It was much against his principles to take human life, save in battle. He turned to Fred and said:

"What do you think, lieutenant—ought I to spare this fellow's life?"

"I don't think that Caroline Mayfair will be safe while he lives."

"I agree with you there. But if I take him to camp he will be tried for various offences there. It is beyond doubt that he will eventually be hung."

Fred hesitated a moment. Then he said:

"On my word, Will, you are right. Let him have the benefit of a trial. We shall feel better about it. They will certainly hang him, as you say."

"All right!" declared Will. "It shall be so."

So he gave the order:

"Spotswood, I countermand that order. Bind the prisoner on a horse, and tie that horse to four guards. Prepare to leave here at once."

The order was quickly obeyed.

Spotswood bound Warden to one of the horses. The prisoner became silent and alert. He had once more a chance for his life.

Mrs. Delmont mounted a horse, and showed that she was a perfect horsewoman.

In a very short time the little company of Grays was on the march toward Gordonsville. The horses captured from Warden's guard were used by the young officers and the wounded members of the company.

Dusk was at hand and they were several miles on their way, when suddenly firing sounded just ahead.

The videttes came rushing in, and after them came a mounted band of guerillas.

For a moment there was confusion in the ranks of the Grays. The troop of guerillas swept down upon them like the wind.

But a well aimed volley drove them back; not, however, until they had laid low five of the little company.

This was not the only catastrophe. As if the retributive hand of justice was in it, one of the bullets struck Warden fair in the chest.

The villain reeled, gasped and fell over the saddle pommel. When Joe Spotswood raised his head he gave a cry:

"It's all up, boys! He's gone to his reward at last! He's dead."

The bullet had passed through the villain's body, killing him instantly. It was a tragic incident.

He was given a hasty grave by the roadside, where the

dead soldier were also buried. Then the little company pressed on.

All that night they marched.

There were times when they were in deadly peril of being cut off by some Union detachment.

But in the early hours of the morning they crossed the Rapid Ann. A few moments later Joe Spotswood cried:

"Hurrah, boys! Hurrah! There is the Bonnie Blue Flag!"

This was seen to be true. Part of Jackson's corps was in sight. It was not many moments before the Grays had joined them.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Grays were glad to go into camp a few hours later. They were much worn out.

Jackson had retired back across the Rapid Ann. He had won a great victory, and this move was not by any means the result of defeat.

The Grays rested for a few days. Both armies were now for a time dormant. It gave Will an opportunity to take a trip to Gordonsville.

He went at once to the home of the Cliffs.

He found his sister Nell still there. She welcomed him warmly.

"Yes," she said, "Caroline is still here. She is Byron's nurse. He has gained wonderfully. He will not let any one else do anything for him."

"That is a bad sign," said Will, with a laugh. Then he went to the invalid's room.

After greeting him he turned to Caroline and put in her hands the papers left by General Mayfair. He gave a full account of the general's death and also of the fate of Warden.

"These papers entail a fortune to you, Caroline," he said. "I congratulate you. You have nothing more to fear. You may go North now as soon as you please."

But Byron Cliff rose in bed.

"No. Will Prentiss," he said, "she will not return North at present. She has agreed to remain and be——"

"Your wife," said Caroline, shyly.

It was a happy ending of the campaign. Will paused only long enough to wish health to the happy pair.

Then he returned to the Virginia Grays and the war.

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